

「二冊目の勇者御記」

作／タカヒロ

イラスト／BUNBUN

Nogi Sonoko joined the Sanshu Middle School Hero Club.
Her existence gave the club members new stimuli.
The lively sleepovers they were having now was part of that.
The purpose of the sleepovers was to get everyone to know each other better and get along.
It was supposed to be an event meant for the newly joined member, Sonoko, but the existing members enjoyed themselves too.
Today, Karin came over to stay at Sonoko's place.
"This sure relaxes the body, doesn't it, Nibosshi?"
"True, it does make me feel all warm and fuzzy all the way to the inside..."
"Types like us whose offerings reached our whole bodies have to take care of every part of our bodies, you know~ Gotta take care~ take care~"
The Nogi Household's rose bath had the same composition of that of a hot spring.
"Um, the bath feels nice and all, but, well, is it really necessary for the two of us to be in it together?"
"I think it's more fun to bathe together~ We can talk this way~ Are you embarrassed, Nibosshi?"
"Well, yeah, I guess."
"But you got into the hot spring with everyone, didn't you~"
"I think there's a difference between a hot spring and a home bath..."
"Yu-yu loved it~ And Wasshi's already used to it."
"That does sound like them..."
"..."
"Wh-what's wrong?"
"Nibosshi, you're cuter with your hair down, huh~ That's so lovely~"
"N-not especially, I don't think..."
"That's a cute reaction~ I'm sure the readers would love a character like you~ my creative urges are rising~"
"Huh, what are you talking about?
"Nothing at all~"
Karin felt slightly teased by Sonoko's characteristic pace.
But she didn't find the situation unpleasant at all.
Inubouzaki Fuu was mulling over something at her own house.
Her little sister, Itsuki was thinking alongside her too.
Nogi Sonoko's addition was quite an asset to the Sanshu Middle School Hero Club.
Fuu was already a third year student and it was already fall.
It was almost time for the next club president to be decided for real.
And naturally, that meant choosing one of the four second years.
"Hmm, they're all wonderful upperclassmen... so I wouldn't worry about that either way."
"Then let's consider each one one by one. I think Tougou's superb, but I get the feeling she's not geared towards being a club president. What do you think?"
"I think Tougou-sempai would be able to handle being club president, but... It was kinda tough when she filled in for club president earlier..."
"True. Next up is Yuuna. She seems like the most likely to display enough power as a leader, but it makes me always makes me a little uneasy to think of her as a club president."
"If Yuuna-san were club president and Tougou-sempai were her assistant, I get the feeling that everything would work out smoothly."
"Yeah, that combination does sound like it could work. So next, how about Nogi?"
"I first believed in humans having things like auras when I saw Sempai."
"Her gravitas really is amazing, huh. Wild birds perch on her fingers. Wild dogs obey her commands. It's as if all creation accepts her... Exactly what you'd expect from the leader of the previous generation of heroes.



Normally, I'd be uneasy about her being club president, but if Tougou is her assistant, then there probably won't be any problems. I mean, that's how the previous generation was, after all."
"If you think about it, Tougou-sempai is better as an assistant than a leader, huh?"
"At now, at least. So, last up's Karin, I guess."
"Karin-san as club president. Yeah, I think that sounds really good."
"You seem emotionally attached to her, Itsuki. But yeah, right now, I think that out of all four candidates, I'd recommend Karin as club president. It'll probably be hard for her, but she is the 'perfect hero' after all, so I'm sure she can manage somehow."
"So that's why you've been getting Karin-san to help out with lots of things then, huh, Onee-chan?"
"Exactly. I'm training her now."
"Good work. You're always thinking about the Hero Club, aren't you? Let me reward you."
Itsuki got up and stood behind her older sister's chair to massage her shoulders.
"Oh-ohhh~ That feels so good~ I didn't know you've been training your massage skills, Itsukiii."
"It's no match for Yuuna-san's anma massage, though."
"That's an outlier. It's like she can massage you down to your soul."
As they spoke, the older sister thought how promising her little sister's growth was.

Recently, Sonoko wasn't showing up at the Hero Club each day.
Sometimes she'd go to the Taisha and gather information.
Going to and from the Taisha was a privilege that not even Karin, whose older brother was in top management, nor Fuu, being district representative, were afforded.
Sonoko was a special case, being the daughter of the upper class Nogi family and having been worshiped at one point, and was thus afforded some flexibility within the Taisha.
Currently, the information Sonoko gained was mostly just about what direction the next Hero System was headed.
But even that information was just hearsay, and they could not be sure if it was 100% truth.
The truth behind what lied outside the wall was a scene so tremendously shocking it was hard to believe.
Countermeasures had to be taken.
That was the Taisha's duty. All the girls needed to do was fulfill their duties as students, and if they were needed again, they would probably be called.
And even though she understood their reasoning, she couldn't remain still after seeing something like that.
There had to be something she could do.
There were too many puzzles that had to be solved.
What exactly was a Vertex in the first place?
What ended the Christian Era and began the Divine Era?
In the off chance that they'd have to fight again, she would not have any of it if they were sent to suffer again without knowing anything.
The Taisha may have been more willing to explain themselves now, but they had a need to know the truth behind their own commitments as well.
That said, the Taisha had worked in secrecy for hundreds of years.
Sonoko thought it might take them some time.
She would have to patiently assemble information.

"I've got a request for the Hero Club~"
Sonoko suddenly spoke up in the Hero Club room.
"So you mean you're the one sending in the request, Sonocchi?"
"Hero Club Five Tenets: If you're worried, talk to someone, right~"
"That's unusual. You've got a request for us, Nogi? Heh, don't tell me you've actually found someone you like?"
"There's someone Sono-chan likes!?"
Yuuna bolted up out of her chair.
"This looks like a job for Itsuki."
"Okay, I'll read your fortune! ...Okay, I've got the results. This looks like it'll be a good romance!"
"My little sister has a knack for drawing the Death card, but she drew a good one this time, huh. Looks great!"
"Yay! So, Sono-chan, who do you like?"
"You know, I get the feeling Nogi's compatible with a caring, on-the-ball kinda guy. Man, if only there were a man like me, you know?"
"Well~ I'm not sure what I like exactly, but someone who's diligent and takes good care of others would be lovely~. It'd be even more fun if they were way too serious and got reckless from time to time, huh~"
"Everyone calm down. Sonocchi's not asking for any romantic advice. The discussion's derailing too far. Sonocchi, knows it's derailing and isn't going along with it."
"Huh, is that so?"
"If you follow the conversation back through, it's Karin's fault for not throwing in a retort before Itsuki did her fortunetelling."
"I think it's more your fault for making the unnecessary comment at the beginning, Fuu!"
"It's so nice that you get along so well that you two can fight~"
Sonoko watched Fu and Karin and kept nodding to herself for some reason.
"Come on, Sonocchi, what is it that's troubling you?"
"Ooohh, That's right. That's right. I'd like you guys to help me sort through some books~. I wanted some material for my novels, so I asked for some history books to sent in from my family house's archive, and they sent me a huuuumongous amount of them. My place is covered in cardboard boxes now~"
"You read history books... That's great, Sonocchi."
Tougou nodded in approval.
"Of course we'll help. But wouldn't the Taisha help if you asked them, Nogi? ...Or is there something happen?"
"No, the people at the Taisha are nice~ They'll do anything for me as long as it's not divulging secrets~ But there are some circumstances with this matter."
"Hmm, and are those circumstances of romance?"
"Why do you always try to connect things to romance?"
"Ahahah, that's the tragedy of having such overflowing girl power. I can't help but talk girl talk. Sorry, Nogi, please continue."
"I was just thinking that maybe~ Maybe some of the books I received had escaped Taisha censorship. So that's why I can't ask the Taisha for help, see~"
"Books that escaped censorship... Those exist?"
"Well, they are books that have been kept at the Nogi household for a long time. It's almost like a treasure hunt!"
"Okay, let's go help with sorting those books without thinking too deeply about it, shall we? As club president, I approve of Nogi's suggestion."
And thus, the hero club's schedule for Sunday was designated as the day to help Sonoko out in sorting through the books at her place.

On the weekend, the Hero Club gathered and headed to Sonoko's place.
The Hero Club had a small boom in sleepovers, so at that time, everyone had been to Sonoko's place, so they didn't get lost on the way.
She rented out an apartment by the station.
It was a new, very high class-looking building.
"Tougou, is that bag full of botamochi?"
"Yes. I flavored it to Sonocchi's liking. What did you bring, Fuu-sempai?"
"A nutrition-packed Inubouzaki bento."
"In other words, a normal bento."
The five girls entered Sonoko's room in a harmonious mood.
"Welcome, guys~"
"Your place smells as nice coming in as always, Nogi."
"I love this smell. It's very calming... uwaah, that's a lot of cardboard boxes, huh, Sono-chan?"
"The room's buried in them. Not even the perfect hero's mind could have predicted there'd be this many."
"I didn't expect them to send so many~ A lot of them are unsealed and organized, but there's just too much to handle. It's a real help to have you guys around~"
"By the way, Itsuki, have you been cleaning your own room?"
"I-I am, but we're not talking about me right now, are we, Karin-san?"
"I was just worried about you as my underclassman."
"It is worrying. Itsuki-chan needs some polishing."
Tougou and Karin nodded at each other.
"Your upperclassmen have their eyes on you, huh? That's my sister, Itsuki. You make a good underclassman."
"That's just because I'm the only underclassman..."
"Welp, we better get to work now, huh. Let's get to it and sort out these books."

"Let's sort through these cardboard boxes first. Let's put the contents here."
Tougou lifted up a heavy cardboard box and smoothly transported it.
"Okay, let's follow after Tougou-san!"
Yuuna, Karin, and Sonoko also began transporting the boxes.
"Mmmmm, it's heavy...."
Only Itsuki was having having a hard time...
"This is nothing that a little guts can't handle!"
Fuu transported the boxes with the honor of a leader.
Books were lined up on the shelf.
They were masterpieces.
Books that could not fit on the shelf were piled up on the floor.
"Ahh, that sure worked up a good sweat! Now we've sorted through most of it."
"We got it all organized in one go~ Thank you so much everyone~"
"It was nothing. I got the feeling that I ate too much udon the last two days, so it was just the right exercise to burn it all off."
"In that case, it's free reading time~ As thanks, you guys can read any book you want. If you find any fun books, tell me too, okay~"
"We can pick and choose, huh... let's see... which one..."
"Ah, Tougou-san's already reading fervently. Hmmm.... All these books look difficult... I might not even understand what's written in them. Do you read books, Karin-chan?"
"Can't you tell from seeing my place? I don't read that much."
Out of the members of the Hero Club, Sonoko, Itsuki, and Tougou were readers.
Fuu would at least read recommended books.
Yuuna read too, but she was a slow reader.
Karin read smoothly, but only things she was interested in.
Everyone else started fishing through the books, so for now, Yuuna decided to start as well.
She thought she might as well look for any unusual books.
With that thought in mind, Yuuna glanced through the bookshelf.
She casually took a book off the shelf.
When she opened it, there were several parts censored in black marks by the Taisha.
"Wow, look guys, this book's pitch black!"
"This book is like that too. They've been censored."
"In the Divine Era, there's an abundance of documents from after the year 100, but there are few from before that."
"The Christian Era doesn't have much following the year 2015, either." [Pretty sure it's Itsuki talking here because of the -ne]
As everyone talked about the censored books, Tougou alone was silently reading.
"I wonder what this book might be? It's quite big."
Her eyes fell on a book that looked like an encyclopedia.
Tougou took that book out as if she were drawn to it.
It was apparently an old century terminology dictionary.
It was filled with words that even they were quite familiar with, all uncensored.
She flipped through that book, and...
"? There's another book inside this book..."
It was a small book, but it was placed inside the encyclopedia.
When she looked inside, there were several parts that were blotted out with black ink.
"It's been censored... but still. The censored date is from Divine Era year 99..."
She casually looked at the front cover of the book.
It said: *Hero Diary*
It was an old book, but the title was clearly written there.
"Hero Diary... That name!?"
It was the same title as the diary Sonoko had recorded when she was worshiped, the Hero Diary
But that diary was written by Sonoko starting in Divine Era year 298.
The book in question was quite old, and judging by the censored date, it had to be from before Divine Era year 99 at the latest.
So what exactly could this Hero Diary be?
"Yuuna-chan, everyone, come here!"
Tougou called for everyone before she let herself get thrown into confusion by herself.
Hero Club Five Tenets: If you're worried, talk to someone.
She presented the book she had found.
"Huh, I never knew we had a book like this~ 'Hero Diary'? That's the same name I gave to my diary, huh..."
"So in other words, this is a diary written by a hero? ... But weren't you guys the first generation of heroes?"
"... I'm not sure, but what's inside~...?"
"Uwah, it's all blotted out, huh."
"But look at this. The date written in this diary isn't censored. It says the diary began to be recorded in July 2015."
"So this is a diary from before we entered the Divine Era..."
"You found something amazing, Tougou-san!"
"Indeed, it's quite exciting."
"Are there any concrete descriptions in it that haven't been blotted out?"
"Let's see~ Hmmm~ This page isn't black~ Ah, the last page!"
On the last page was a mention of the book's author.
There was even a photograph of her.
It was a girl about the same age as Tougou and the other girls.
She was a dignified beauty.
"The person in this photograph... looks quite beautiful, doesn't she?"
"She kinda has the same aura as Nogi, don't you think?"
"Hey, wait, her name's written here."
Nogi Wakaba
"Nogi... Wakaba... Is she my ancestor~? If she wrote this diary, then does that mean my ancestor was a hero?"
"Sonocchi's ancestor wrote a Hero Diary. No, perhaps I should say that since you're her descendant, and that's why you gave your diary the same title?"
"There were already heroes that far back in the past, huh... This doesn't look like a prank at all, either... That's quite a surprise, huh, Yuuna?"
"..."
"Yuuna, what's wrong?"
"..."
"Yuuna?"

July 30, 2015 CE
Everything began on that day--

"The Second Hero Diary"
THE END



DENGEKI G's

NEW RELEASE!!
01

NOVEL



アウトロー・ワンダーランド－0－

著：田中ロミオ　キャラクター原案・原絵：saitom　挿絵：大岩ケンジ

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（ゆにてらす）
絵筆：朱白あおい　イラスト：BUNBUN　監修：Project 2H

［電撃G'sノベル］ 電撃G's magazine 2015年9月号付録

CONTENTS

003

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

021

アウトロー・ワンダーランド -0-（ゼロ）

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・扉絵：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

035

次号予告

DENGEKI G's NOVEL

電撃G's magazine 2015年9月号付録
［ 電撃G'sノベル ］



This afternoon,

I peered over the Seto Inland Sea from Marugame Castle.

Each time I stand here, I renew my vow.

I swear to take back the world stolen from us.

We as heroes are the weapons to achieve that goal.

Small may our numbers be, but we must fulfill our duty.

Among our comrades,

A proactive stance like Yuuna's is hard to find in this world.

I can see an unstable side to [redacted], but...

Hero Record Aug 2018 AD

Nogi Wakaba's Record


vol.1
Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by BUNBUN
Vertex Design by D.K&JW WORKS
Supervision by Project 2H
第一話―芽出―
乃木若葉は勇者である
企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい　イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JW WORKS
監修／Project 2H
©2014 Project 2H



-July 30, 2018

Nogi Wakaba stood at the Kagawa Prefecture Marugame Castle atop the inner citadel stone walls, overlooking the Seto Inland Sea.

In her hand was a sword. Ever since before she could remember, Wakaba had been training in iai, and thus the weight of that sword felt quite familiar to her body.

The midsummer sunlight poured down from above, causing sweat to seep from her skin.

Cicadas were chirping busily around her.

She closed her eyes.

She still vividly remembered-- the despair and anger from that day.

* * *

-July 30, 2015

Nogi Wakaba, a fifth grader at the time, was taking refuge at a shrine's kagura-den in Shimane Prefecture.
She was on a field trip from Kagawa to Shimane when an intense earthquake occurred. Earthquakes kept happening intermittently after that, and so the teachers decided it was an emergency situation and evacuated the students to the shrine, which was the shelter in the area. The number of people in the shelter, which included nearby residents, was quite high.

Wakaba's school was holding a field trip in the middle of summer break due to the number of lesson days, but it was completely unexpected that they would get caught in an emergency situation like this.

As class president, Wakaba took a roll call of her classmates and informed their home-room teacher that all were present and accounted for. According to what she heard from the teachers, apparently, the earthquakes weren't happening just in Shimane, but everywhere throughout the country. Fissures and tsunamis were happening as a result, and damage was happening throughout Japan...

However, Wakaba's classmates seemed to actually find it exciting how this turn of events happened during their field trip. Friends were talking amongst each other and those with smart-phones were checking news sites.

-"You think we'll have to stay here until tomorrow?"

-"Wha? But we're finally on a field trip and everything."

-"Anyone have cards?"

A group of three girls was chatting amongst themselves. Wakaba looked towards them.

(I should probably warn them... no, there's no need to go that far. Letting them chat like this might actually help soften their anxiety.)

As she had that thought in mind,

-"...Ah, Nogi-san's glaring at us."

-"Are we being too noisy?"

-"Let's quiet it down before she gets angry at us."

The girls who had been talking softened their voices.

(Ah... I wasn't particularly mad or anything ...Does my face really look that scary...?)

-"Wah-kah-bah chan!"

Wakaba turned around as the voice called to her to see a camera flash before her eyes. It was her classmate and childhood friend, Uesato Hinata with a smart-phone at the ready.

-"Mmm... Wakaba-chan... you're so picturesque with that listless look on your face. The shrine building in the background is great too. That's one more picture in my treasured Wakaba-chan image collection."

-"Hi~na~ta~... Don't collect photos of me! Delete it!"

-"No! This image collection is my lifework!"

Hinata boldly declared something incomprehensible.

-"Please don't make such a scary face. Your forehead's gonna get wrinkly, you know! Squishy squishy."

-"... Could you please not press on people's foreheads with your fingers?"

-"I'm just trying to loosen you up. It's because of that strict face of yours that classmates get scared of you just like what happened now."

-"You... you saw that?"

Wakaba's face heated up in embarrassment.

-"Now, now, Wakaba-chan, it's because you're always so serious. Ever since first grade, you've been an honour student and class president. Our classmates have this image of you being an 'iron woman'."

-"Uggh..."

She was aware of it herself, but it was still a shock to hear it again.

-"But... You just gotta shatter that image yourself!"

Hinata grinned and took Wakaba by the hand as she lead her back to that same group of female classmates.



-"H-hey, wait!?"

-"Good evening!"

Hinata ignored Wakaba's confusion as she called out to the girls. The girls were just as confused.

-"Sorry about that. The truth is that Wakaba-chan wanted to join in on your conversation."

-"H-Hinata, what are you--!?"

-"What are you being so embarrassed about? You see, she wasn't thinking of giving you girls a warning. She was actually having a cute little inner struggle of how to join in on the conversation."

-"Wha? That's not--"

When Wakaba tried to deny the story, Hinata covered Wakaba's mouth.

-"Mmm! Mmm!"

The three girls were confused for a second--
But eventually that confusion seemed to blow away and they smiled.

-"Hmm, that kinda changes my image of Nogi-san."

-"Well, she always seems precise, and she's quite the honour student, after all"

-"Yeah, yeah. I thought she was a scarier, stricter person!"

-"I see what you mean-- Oh, and Wakaba-chan's unsociable, so she's at a disadvantage in that regard, I think."

It was a bizarre progression of events, but Wakaba and Hinata joined the group of three girls and talked with them. Hinata spoke with them as familiarly as one would speak with years-long friends.

She had the sociability to get along with anyone, which Wakaba lacked. Because of Wakaba's over-ly-serious nature, she felt a little disconnected with the rest of the class.

-"But she's a super cute girl on the inside. I, Uesato Hinata, can attest to that. So please get along with her, okay?"

-"C-c-c-c-cute...? What are you talking about!?"

Despite Wakaba glaring at her, Hinata didn't shy away and just said 'now now'.

-"Ahahah, that's so funny. Don't worry. We're already friends with Nogi-san now."

The girls smiled and said that as they saw Wakaba and Hinata's interactions.





After they had talked for a while, Wakaba went outside the kagura-den. Though it was already evening, the July heat was still substantial, so she wanted to feel a little bit of the evening breeze.

From time immemorial, a shrine's torii was said to be a boundary to an outer world. Back in the age before people had forgotten religious piety, a shrine was treated as another world. Wakaba did not know that shrines held that meaning, but she was able to feel the place's tranquillity.

When she looked up at the sky, she could see the twinkling of countless stars.

-"So this is where you were, Wakaba-chan. It's getting late. Aren't you going to sleep?"

Hinata had gone outside as well and she stood beside Wakaba.

-"Well, a problem could arise while we're sleeping for all we now. I thought I'd stay awake just in case."

-"The teachers should be the ones to stay awake, though."

-"I'm class president, so it's my duty."

-"Haah~... Really, Wakaba-chan. I don't know if you're just being way too serious or what."

Hinata smiled slightly in resignation.

-"So I'll stay awake with you."

-"... You don't need to accompany me, you know?"

-"No, it's because I'm your childhood friend. I'll always be with you."

When Hinata answered in such a clear tone of voice, Wakaba had no more forceful words to say.

-"... Hinata."

-"What is it?"

-"Thanks for what you did back there. If you weren't around, I would've ended up distancing myself from our classmates again."

-"No, no, I just don't like it when people misunderstand you, Wakaba-chan."

Hinata spoke as if she had only done the natural thing to do.

But Wakaba wasn't satisfied with just that.

-"A reward for everything. That's the Nogi way of life."

That was a commandment that Wakaba's grandmother often spoke of. Wakaba loved her grandmother dearly, and so she treasured those words of hers.

-"So I want to reward you for your friendship, Hinata. If there's anything you want me to do for you, then just ask.

-"Well, if you insist... hmm, then how about you help me grow my treasured image collection by wearing... some sort of cosplay? ... While we're at it, how about something a little extreme..."

Hinata muttered something improper.

Perhaps Wakaba spoke too soon... she was starting to regret her decision a little.

-"Well, I'll take my time to think of what I should have you do, Wakaba-chan. Anyway, for now, it'd be great for you to be more at ease when you talk to people in class. If you do, then everyone else will start to understand you and get along with you better. If you ever get nervous about talking to someone, I'll help you out just like I did now."

Hinata's words slowly sank into Wakaba's body.

(I can get along with everyone better... huh?)

Wakaba was a little detached from the class, but perhaps she herself had been unconsciously distancing herself from her classmates. Perhaps if she actually tried talking to people like they did now, it would be simple to get along with everyone.

-"Ah, but then if you get really popular, you might not care about me anymore, Wakaba-chan. You'll toss me out like a woman of the past, won't you... yoyoyo."

-"Wh-what are you talking about!? Of course I wouldn't do that! No matter what happens, you're my best friend!"

As Wakaba struggled to put together words, Hinata smiled strangely.

-"It was just a joke. Oh, Wakaba-chan--"

Suddenly, the ground shook intensely.

(This... is on a completely different scale than the other tremors...!)

The tremors made it difficult to even stand. Wakaba kept her stance lowered to prevent herself from falling down. Beside her, Hinata let out a small shriek as her rear fell to the ground. After a few dozen seconds, the tremors settled.

-"That was a huge tremor, huh... Hinata, you okay?"

Wakaba held her hand out to Hinata.

But without taking her hand, Hinata just muttered with a ghostly pale look on her face.



-"I'm scared..."

-"Huh?"

Hinata's body was trembling slightly.

-"Wa-Wakaba-chan... s... something really, really scary is..."

She looked up to the sky as she spoke.

Thinking there was something up there, Wakaba looked up as well.

On her first look, what she saw was an ordinary starry sky.

But she was mistaken.

The countless stars in the sky squirmed as if they were drifting about on the surface of water.

At first, Wakaba thought the star-like objects were birds or something.

But their movements were irregular and it would be strange for so many birds to be flying in the sky so late at night.

And then several of those stars got bigger and bigger--

Despair fell from the sky.

One of the star-like objects fell onto the roof of the kagura-den. It definitely was not a bird at all. Its entire body was an almost unnatural white, its size far more gigantic than a human, with an ominous mouth-like organ. It appeared to be like a deep sea animal that had evolved far differently than terrestrial animals, or possibly an invertebrate that was born under imperfect conditions. In any case, it was clearly different from any living being known to mankind, and therefore, the simplest name to call it was-- a "monster".

And it wasn't alone. Two, three... several came falling from the sky in quick succession, tearing apart the kagura-den's roof and walls with their teeth and breaking in.

-"What... are those things...?"

Wakaba stood stock still at the bizarre sight unravelling before her.
On unsteady feet-- Hinata stood up. A strange light imbued her eyes and hex-like words leaked from her mouth.

"--...----.....----.....----"

The moment Wakaba tried to ask what was wrong, people darted out from inside the kagura-den, screaming.

-"Kyaaaaaaaah!!"

-"Wh-wha-what are those monsters!?"

(Khh!)

Wakaba immediately rushed to the kagura-den. Hinata grabbed her by the hand.

-"I'm going too."

The strange light had disappeared from Hinata's eyes, and instead, they displayed an intense will. Her tone of voice was firm as well.

Wakaba began to wonder what was with her bizarre state just a few seconds ago...? There was no time to think about that. All that mattered now was to protect their classmates for now.

Wakaba and Hinata rushed into the kagura-den. And what they saw-- was people being eaten.

The bizarre white creatures were eating the people who were too slow to escape with their mouth-like organs. Their mouths became stained red by blood and beneath their giant bodies were pieces of half-eaten people. Including the completely disfigured remains of students from Wakaba's school.

-"Ah... ahh..."

A groan leaked out of Wakaba's mouth.

She couldn't believe the scene unfurling before her eyes. It felt too unreal. The friends she had been enjoyed talking to less than an hour ago were now reduced to unspeakable remains.

-"Waaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh!!"

Wakaba rushed towards the bizarre creatures. She was driven by rage for her murdered friends and the sense of duty to prevent any further death. As she ran, she picked up a fragment of wood that had probably broken off when the roof was destroyed, and pierced the fragment's pointed end into one of the monsters.

But... for some reason, there was no feedback.

The white giant flung Wakaba away like a bug. Her small body fell onto an altar inside the shrine. The altar broke, sending a shock and pain through Wakaba's entire body.

-"Ugh... gh..."

Her body wouldn't move.

She moved just her head and saw the bizarre creatures looking her way.



The people who were quick enough to react had already fled the building, but some of the children in Wakaba's grade were paralyzed with fear.

(Run... away...)

Wakaba tried to yell that, but she could hardly even muster a whisper. The children who were too slow to run away, and Wakaba herself were all being cornered by the monsters.

But then, Hinata's voice rang out.

-"Wakaba-chan, please reach out your right hand! It should be there!"

(My hand...?)

Wakaba reached out her right hand as told.

She felt it touch something.

A sword.

A sword and scabbard rusted from the passing years had been inside the broken altar.

(Why... why would a sword be here...?)

Wakaba grasped the grip and pulled it in.

Throb. Blood suddenly started pounding through her entire body.

She felt like she was on fire.

She felt like she was drowning.

And at the same time-- an unknown strength welled up inside of her as if to reconstruct her body into something else entirely.

In ancient times, there was a king of the gods of the land whose name was 《Musuu no Buki (無数の武器/Infinite Weapons)》.

He and his fellow gods tried to protect the children of their country.

Among the king's sacred treasures was a sword from the underworld.

Simple. Yet beautiful. A weapon unmatched in murderous power.

Its name-- 《Ikutachi (生大刀/The Life Force Blade)》

When she snapped back to her senses, Wakaba was standing up with that very sword in hand. She could've sworn the blade was rusted, but before she had realized it, the blade was tinged with a vibrant, almost living, brilliance.

Wakaba sheathed the sword, brought her left foot forward, and held the grip,





and stared at the enemy. She had trained in iai since childhood. Her accumulated experience moved her body naturally.

The white monster's giant body approached.

As Wakaba drew it from its sheath, her sword was light itself.

The being that entered its range was instantly split in two.

As Wakaba re-sheathed the sword, the split monster let out a hard-to-describe cry and vanished.

And then one by one, Wakaba cut down the onslaught of bizarre creatures, each with a single stroke of her sword. It was a mysterious sensation. The sword was easy to handle, as if it were but an extension of her arm, and her body moved as swiftly as the wind.

In the blink of an eye, all the monsters in the kagura-den were eradicated.

-"Wakaba-chan! Those strange things are overflowing outside too!"

Hinata screamed that as she ran towards Wakaba.

Before they had realized it, tremendous numbers of the monsters had the kagura-den surrounded outside. The people who tried to escape began to despair at their loss of escape routes.

As Wakaba left the kagura-den, she gripped her sword.

No matter how many dozens of enemies there were, she would not falter--

-"... Wh-what...?"

Something unusual happened with the monsters.

Several of them lumped together in the same place and conglomerated like clay, changing form into something even more gigantic...

Some changed into a form like a centipede.

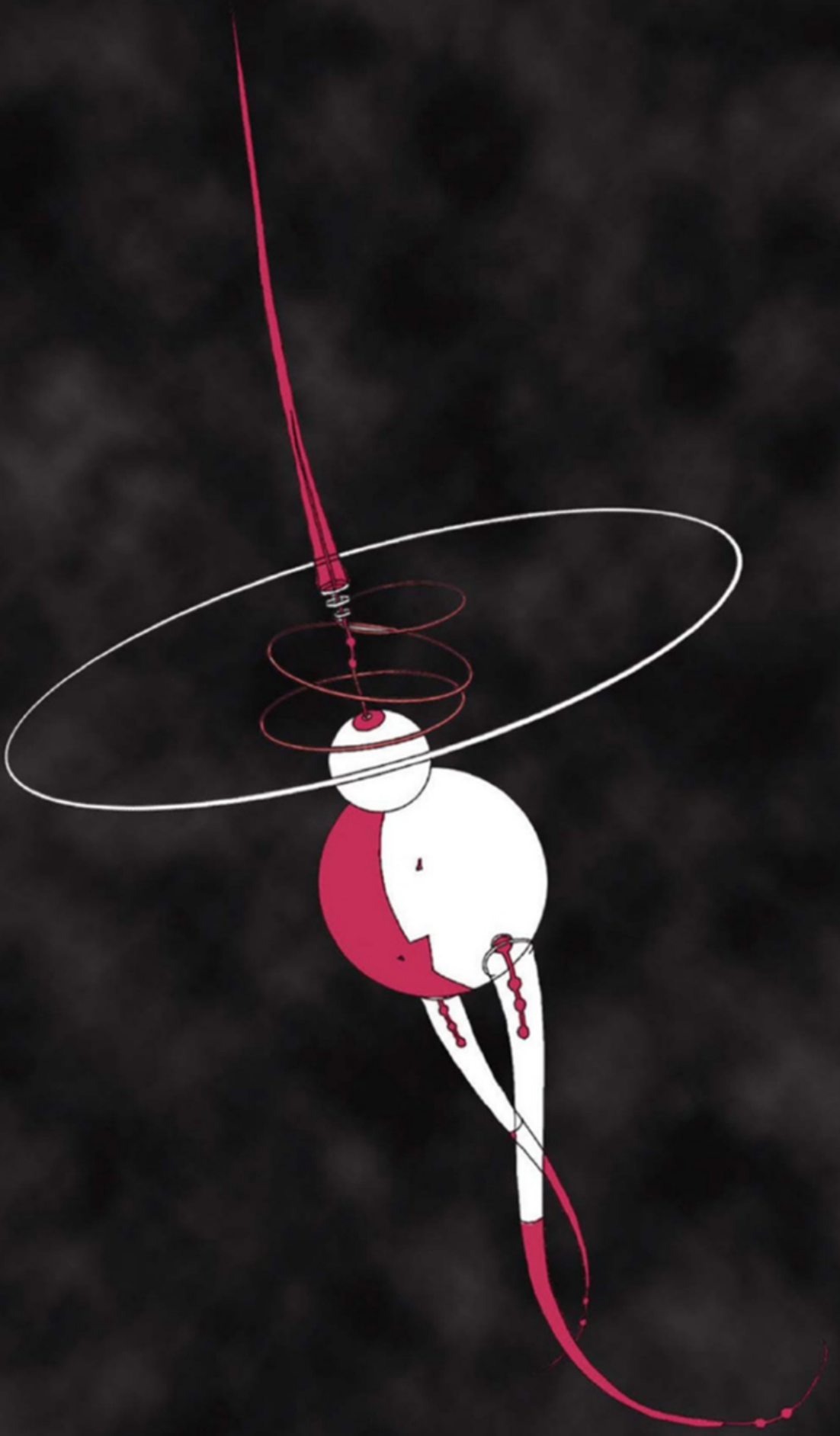
Some changed into a form like a body surface with an arrow.

Some changed into a form like the edge of a section of body tissue, stiffening and rising up.

(... They're... evolving...?)

Perhaps they had learned that they individually could not defeat Nogi Wakaba. The means they had chosen to oppose an existence stronger than themselves was to "evolve".

The biological evolution was to begin with the simplest single celled organism, take several of those single celled organisms together to create a colony, and from colonies, complex multi-cellular organisms would arise.





What the white monsters were undergoing was truly biological evolution itself, except at an abnormal speed.

It took billions and billions of years for life on earth to evolve from single-celled organisms to multi-cellular organisms. And yet it took these monsters mere minutes.

In a certain sense, those monsters could perhaps be said to surpass all life on earth. They were beings like "gods" or "demons"--

One of the creatures that had conglomerated and increased in size shot out the arrow that its body had produced. The arrow pierced through all the people in its trajectory, wrecking the kagura-den at the end of its path. With just one strike, a third of the kagura-den crumbled to the ground.

Meanwhile, the number of the smaller monsters grew and grew, repeating the cycle of conglomerating and changing form, giving birth to countless numbers of the large monsters.

All thoughts of winning disappeared completely from Wakaba's mind. How could she win against countless numbers of enemies with unthinkable destructive force?

Right as her entire body threatened to collapse out of despair--

What supported her was her best friend.

-"Please don't give up, Wakaba-chan."

-"... Hinata..."

-"I won't let you and everyone die, Wakaba-chan."

Hinata spoke with a resolute, and somehow confident tone.

Hinata turned to everyone there and shouted.

-"Everyone follow me! I'll guide you to a safe place!"

Hinata then walked forth at an unfaltering pace. Her visage was calm and collected, so much so that it was hard to believe she was a mere 10-year-old girl.

-"Hinata, where are you...?"

-"Wakaba-chan, I need you to be the outrider."

The current aura about her suggested she would not take no for an answer.

-"... Okay."

There was no time for hesitation. Wakaba had no choice but to trust her friend.

-"Come with us if you want to live!"

With Wakaba and Hinata at the lead, other people followed, though confused. Wakaba cut down any enemies that stood in Hinata's way.

The group lead by the two reached the shrine's honden. The honden was surrounded by gates and walls, and for some reason, not a single one of the white monsters had appeared within.

-"They cannot enter here."

Hinata spoke with relief in her face, as if a weight had been taken off of her shoulders.

The people who had followed Wakaba and Hinata didn't look like they could believe it, but they still sat down as if they had lost their strength.

-"How... did you know this place was safe?"

Wakaba asked Hinata.

Hinata tilted her head a little to the side as if in thought as she answered.

-"Hmm... a hunch, I guess."

-"A-a hunch...?"

Wakaba smiled wryly. Hinata sounded a little too confident back there for just a hunch... but it was quite like Hinata to do something like that.

-"But it's not like we can stay here forever, can we?"

-"Right..."

Such a cramped place could only serve as temporary shelter.

-"It's okay. I know a safe route from here, too."

-"Another hunch, huh?"

-"Yes."

Hinata nodded with a smile. Her unwavering tone of voice sounded mysteriously trustworthy to Wakaba. Perhaps Hinata had been endowed with some sort of power in the same way Wakaba had been endowed with the power to fight.

Wakaba looked at her sword-- if something were to happen, she had the power to fight.

After a short break, Wakaba and Hinata left the honden with the refugees. They proceeded under Hinata's guidance and for some reason they came across next to none of the white monsters, and when they did, Wakaba was able to eliminate them.

The group headed southeast. They walked for days and days. And yet the sun never rose during all that time. It was as if the entire world was suffering from a nightmare from which it could not awaken.

Wakaba saw every building was in ruins. The town was half submerged in water. Countless corpses that had likely been eaten by those monsters. A gigantic fire blazed endlessly beyond the horizon. Darkness and grotesque white shapes covered the sky, filling the atmosphere with the stench of death.

Wakaba was understood--



--Ahh, they've stolen our world from us.

How long have they walked?

Wakaba and the rest of the refugees reached the ocean. On the other side was the homeland, Shikoku. The Great Bridge that connected Honshu and Shikoku remained intact in all its original majesty, as if to guide the people across.

* * *

Three years later-- Nogi Wakaba was now a second year in middle school.

-"Wah-kah-bah- chan~"

Wakaba snapped back to once she heard a voice from behind her.

When she turned around, she heard the sound of a camera shutter.

It was Uesato Hinata smiling with a smart-phone at the ready.

-"Got a picture... of a beautiful girl holding a sword while gazing at the ocean. One more for the treasured Wakaba-chan image collection."

-"Hi-na-tah....!"

Wakaba reached for Hinata's smart-phone, but Hinata nimbly pocketed it before she could grab it.

-"Heh heh heh. Now you can't reach for it, can you?"

Hinata spoke triumphantly.

(Khh... One day I'll delete Hinata's incomprehensible image collection for sure.)

Wakaba and Hinata's relationship still hasn't changed. The two of them are best of friends.

Suddenly, Hinata put on a serious expression and turned to the sea.

-"You came here again today, huh."

-"... Yeah."

Three years ago on that day.

The bizarrely-shaped white monsters they saw that day-- which later came to be called "Vertexes"-- appeared all over the world and trampled humanity.

Apparently, an extremely limited number of regions-- such as parts of Nagano and Shikoku-- were able to escape the invasion. However, other areas no longer belonged to mankind, but could now be said to be under the control of the Vertexes.

In the midst of such an abnormal situation, an extraordinarily small number of girls demonstrated unique powers. Wakaba and Hinata were two of such girls. It was due to those powers that the two of them were able to save many of the people sheltered at the shrine.

However.

Many lives were lost then.

The people who could not escape from the kagura-den and were killed by the Vertexes.

Most of them were students in Wakaba's grade who came for the field trip. The classmates Wakaba made friends with that night were killed as well.

--Don't worry. We're already friends with Nogi-san now.

Wakaba still could not forget their words and their smiles.

The students who survived took a huge shock to see their friends slaughtered before their eyes. The after-effects caused a hindrance to their daily lives. Many were still undergoing counselling.

-"... Vertexes killed my friends. They stole the lives of countless innocents."

That was an unforgivable, grave sin.

A reward for everything... That's the Nogi way of life.

-"I swear I'll give the Vertexes their just reward. And I'll take back the world they stole from us."

-"Yes. I'll be there with you too, Wakaba-chan."

AD 2018--

They were granted their roles.

Nogi Wakaba is a "hero", one who wields divine power.

Uesato Hinata is a "priestess", one who hears divine voice.

(Chapter 1 End)

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME TWO!!
02

NOVEL



アウトロー・ワンダーランド-0-

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・
原絵：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

SILENT WORLD

著：ごぉ
イラスト：空中幼影

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・
シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ
（みなとそふと）
執筆：
朱白あおい
イラスト：
BUNBUN
監修：
Project 2H

［ DENGEKI G's NOVEL ］ 電撃G's magazine 2015年10月号付録②

CONTENTS

003

SILENTWORLD

著：ごぉ
イラスト：空中幼彩

025

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

043

アウトロー・ワンダーランド-0-

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・扉絵：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

DENGEKI G's NOVEL

電撃G's magazine 2015年10月号付録②
[DENGEKI G's NOVEL]



The days of peace continue.

I used to think training everyday was pretty hard, and being at school with just the [redacted] of us was kinda boring, but once you get used to it you realize it's not actually that bad.

Still, we don't know how much longer we can enjoy this period of peace.

With things as they are, I'm kinda worried about [redacted].

She's the most fragile out of the Shikoku heroes.

But Wakaba doesn't seem to notice it.

Wakaba is strong.

Because she's strong, she might not understand people's weaknesses.

It can't be helped.

I suppose I'll have to look after her.

Just leave it to Tama!.

Hero Record Sep 2018 AD

Doi Tamako's Record


第二話
花蕾
乃木若葉は勇者である
vol.2
企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい　イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JW WORKS
監修／Project 2H
©2014 Project 2H



August 31st 2018 AD, at the Marugame castle.

Across the window, the summer's blue sky could be seen.

Shikoku's sky looked exactly the same even after the attack. Rather, the city, passing vehicles and people, the whistling of cicadas and the beauty of the Edo sea.

None of it seemed different.

After the invasion, a special tree by the name "Shinju" appeared in Shikoku, and a giant wall made of plant tissue surrounded the island. It is said that Shinju was the incarnation of the local gods, and the wall was a barrier it put up to stop the Vertex.

People are safe as long as they're inside this barrier. Peace was granted inside the confines of this tiny space...Some people started calling Shikoku "The Ark". After this disaster, comparable to great flood from the myth would pass, the world would once again be returned to the people; or so Wakaba thought was their reasoning.

(However...Things were clearly different from before...)

At the moment, the number of people passing by in town grew fewer; among them those wearing a hat or holding an umbrella stood out.

It was no countermeasure against the summer sun.

"Sky fear syndrome"

Some of the people who were present during the attack three years ago were still in a state of shock, and started feared looking up at the sky. The phenomenon was referred to as the "Sky fear syndrome". Severe cases were unable to even step outside a building.

Even now, the scars left by the Vertex's attack on the people's hearts still had not healed.

-"Wa~kaba-chan"

At that moment, Hinata occupied Wakaba's entire field of vision. She looked down on her with reproachful eyes.

Wakaba was using her lap as pillow while Hinata cleaned her ears.

-"There you go making that stern face again. Excess stress and strain are bad for your body. If you're gonna be like that...EI!"

-"?!"

Hinata moved the cotton swab in a circular motion inside Wakaba's ear. Overwhelmed by the pleasant feeling, Wakaba felt the strength draining out of her body.

The serious look from before completely disappeared from her face; her expression changed to that of a baby being lulled to sleep by his mother.

She's had Hinata clean her ears for her for a long time and by now, she could even be called a pro at Wakaba ear-cleaning.

-"There we go, all done"

As she said that, she pulled the swab out. Wakaba, feeling a tiny bit of regret that it's over, got up as well.

-"Now then, it's about time to get in contact with "Nagano". Please go on ahead"

-"Right"

Wakaba picked up the sword next to her, and headed for the broadcasting room.

The Marugame castle was remodelled and used as a school for Wakaba and the others. The exterior design was mostly left intact while the inside sections were slightly modified.

Only 6 students attended that school, 5 "heroes" and a single "Miko".

Heroes are endowed with the power of the local gods in order to fight off the Vertex. Wakaba was one such Hero, who awakened to her power during the
invasion three years ago.

There are currently 5 heroes in Shikoku, all of which are attending this school.

A Miko is an oracle who can hear the voice of the gods. Thanks to that ability, Hinata was able to save numerous people during the attack.

Although it says "hearing the voice of the gods", it is not through common speech, but rather in the form of symbols and suggestive hints that instructions are
transmitted to her.

Both the Heroes and the Miko are young girls.

Only the purest of girls are able to come in contact with the gods who detest impurity.

Wakaba was also chosen as a temporary leader for the Shikoku heroes.

She made her way into the broadcasting room, pressed the radio switch and
started it up.

After a bit of static noise cleared, the calm voice of a young girl could be heard from the radio.

-"...Shiratori here, speaking from Nagano. Now starting up the hero communication"

-"Nogi from Kagawa here. I'll be in your care"



An area in the east southern part of the Suwa Lake in Nagano prefecture was similar to Shikoku, a place protected by a barrier where people could live.

Shiratori was the only hero in charge of protecting it.

-"Shiratori-san, how's the situation there?"

-"Not fantastic; not that it has ever been since that day three years ago"

-"...No kidding"

Wakaba strived not to sound too gloomy.

Originally, a larger area with the Suwa lake at the center was a safe zone, but due to the repeated attacks that followed during the three years, land was lost and only a portion in the east southern area of the lake could be maintained.

-"For now, Maintaining the status-quo wou-...bzzzzzt.....ity"

Shiratori's voice was cut.

-"Sorry, It appears there was some noise"

-"Right; As I was saying, maintaining the status-quo should be our priority for now. This line of communication has been getting more and more unstable lately"

-"Yeah..."

-"I wonder how much longer we'll be able to use it..."

As she thought about it, Wakaba felt slightly depressed. In order not to show it, she quickly changed the subject.

-"Speaking of which, Shiratori-san. Isn't it about time we settled our score..."

-"Yes, I myself was thinking the exact same thing. Today is the day we put an end to it..."

Shiratori gave a bold response.

-"Which of the two is superior, Udon or Soba!!"

Both voices spoke at the same time.

-"Udon is obviously superior, there is no room for comparison"

-"Exactly, no comparison is needed. Soba is clearly better"

-"...What foolishness. Have you even tasted Kagawa's Udon before? That
mysterious feel to it, that glittering whiteness, that excquisite deliciousness that you can never get enough of...Something like Soba could never compare"

-"fufufu, and have YOU ever eaten Nagano's Soba, Nogi-san? That elegant
fragrance, that rich feeling of it going down your throat, that perfect combination of soup and noodles...It is superior to Udon in every way"

As the two listened to each-other's words, they replied back.

-"...Well, Not only does Soba win in the taste department, it is also good for your health. Soba contains Rutin which helps prevent atherosclerosis and various lifestyle diseases. In other words, a perfectly healthy meal"

-"Hah, and here I was wondering what you were gonna say next. If we're talking about non-taste related things, then Udon is the easiest to digest out of all types of noodles. Even in the case of those suffering from exhaustion or some type of disease reducing their bodily functionalities, it can provide them with the necessary energy quickly. This here is extremely vital for a warrior. Udon could even be described as the supreme nutrient for battle."

-"...."

-"...."

The two go deep in thought, planning their next rebuttal.

At that moment, the sound of the chime echoed throughout the building. Although it was summer break, the chime always rang at the exact time.

-"Out of time, huh. Looks like Soba was spared"

-"That is my line, Udon is the one that managed to escape with its life...The new semester starts tomorrow, so it would be best if we left communication until after classes were over"

-"A fair point. Well then, until tomorrow. I pray for your safety and good luck at Nagano"

-"May you be safe at Shikoku as well"

Wakaba hung up.

Her light exchanges with Shiratori were very dear to her. Since she could not leave Shikoku, this was the closest thing to the "outside" she had left. It let her feel safe knowing there was a friend out there fighting as well.

The next day.

August has ended, and the new semester started.

Even during summer break, Wakaba and the others kept coming to school for their training, so it didn't exactly feel like a "new semester" to them. The heroes and the Miko were the final hope of mankind against the Vertex, there was absolutely no way they would miss their daily training.



As usual, the earliest to arrive is Wakaba, she lightly cleaned up the classroom and prepared the chalk for the blackboard and such.

-"Morning'!! Ah, You're here first again Wakaba. Just when Tama finally thought she'd be the first to make it!"

The next to arrive was Doi Tamako. She was also a Hero just like Wakaba. Tamako with her short figure entered the classroom.

And, as if hiding behind her, Iyojima Anzu followed in her steps. well, technically speaking, since she was taller than Tamako she wasn't hiding in the slightest.

It simply looked that way, because of her calm demeanour compared to Tamako's lively personality. Anzu was also one of the heroes.

-"Good morning, Doi, Iyojima"

-"Wakaba!! Tomorrow Tama will definitely get here first!"

Tamako pointed at Wakaba, as she made her declaration. For some reason, she burned with competitive spirit towards Wakaba. Wakaba thought pleasantly of her tiny posture.

-"Tamacchi, you shouldn't pick up a fight first thing in the morning~"

Anzu called out to her in an attempt to appease her. Tamako then turned around and looked at her with scornful eyes.

-"A~N~ZU~. What the hell is "Tamacchi"?! Tama is older than you. Call me Tamacchi-senpai!"

-"I like Tamacchi better..."

Anzu let out a bitter smile.

Tamako and Wakaba were both in their second year of middle school, while Anzu was a year below. School years were all mixed up since all the heroes from Shikoku gathered in here. Tamako and Anzu were like siblings...however people's opinions often split on which was the older and which was the younger sister.

Next to arrive was Hinata.

-"Good morning, everyone"

Her calm voice and graceful expression, her elegant demeanour made you doubt she was the same age as the others.

As Tamako turned around to face Hinata, she glanced at her posture her upper half in particular and back to her child-like body, then said in her frustration.

-"Kuh...Look at you exposing those devilish lumps once again! Prepare to receive your punishment!!"

-"Wait...Tamacchi-san, please stop fondling my breasts!"

-"I'm not fondling them! I'm trying to tear them off!"

Tamako started massaging Hinata's bountiful chest.

Wakaba and Anzu quickly pulled the rabid Tamako away from Hinata.

-"LET ME GO! Tama needs to punish those demonic things"

-"Calm yourself, Doi!"

-"That's right. You're still growing Tamacchi-senpai!"

-"Uwaa~n! Now even Anzu is looking down on me!"

In the midst of the commotion, Koori Chikage entered the classroom. She was also a hero and 3rd year middle schooler.

-"....."

Chikage looked toward the group, then averted her eyes out of disinterest as she made her way to her seat. She wasn't very talkative and seemed to avoid interacting with other people.

Finally, right before the final chime rang, Takashima Yuuna made it to the classroom. She also was a 2nd year and a hero.

-"Good morning~! Takashima Yuuna has arrived. Thank god, I'm not late!"

Yuuna exchanged greetings with everyone in the classroom, and headed for her seat beside Chikage.

-"Good morning...Takashima-san"

-"Morning, Gun-chan!"

-"You were...late today"

-"Yeah, I was watching this martial arts program on TV yesterday, and tried mimicking and practicing the moves as I watched. I got too excited and couldn't sleep. HA! CHOP! ROUND HOUSE KICK!"

Yuuna swung her arm down and did a 360° kick.

-"Takashima-san...You shouldn't raise your leg so high...Your underwear would be visible"

-"Ah! ehehe..."

Yuuna held her skirt down while blushing.

The silent Chikage, could often be seen talking only to Yuuna. Chikage was older, but just like Tamako and Anzu they heeded no attention to the age difference and treated each other as equals.

Yuuna had a very likeable personality, and got along with everyone in the class. Even Chikage who tended to build walls around herself could not turn her down.



The morning classes had started.

Although the only students at this school were heroes and a Miko, subjects were no different than a normal one. In addition, they received special training to fight off the Vertex.

As a first order of their training on this new semester, they were shown visual recordings of the battle the JDF fought against the Vertex three years ago.

In the footage, rifles and tank canons were fired at the Vertex that appeared in the city, but not only did it not hurt them, it didn't even seem to have any effect. The Vertex swarmed the tanks like ants, ate through the steel shells and devoured the people inside as if they were a meal for them.

Normal weapons were useless against the Vertex, only those that the Heroes wielded could inflict damage upon them.

Wakaba's weapon was a sword she obtained from the shrine in Izumo, three years ago. From a scientific analysis of the material, it looked no more than a sword made after the Heian period. However, the moment Wakaba shows the will to fight and takes it in her hand, the sword gets filled with divine energy.

A certain Miko called the power flowing through Wakaba's sword "Ikutachi".

The other heroes also each had a special weapon.

At the end of the footage, the homeroom teacher said.

-"Only heroes have the ability to stand against the Vertex. Your power is needed."

Wakaba and the others had seen the recordings and listened to those words numerous times before.

What exactly are Vertex?

Why is mankind being attacked?

The details were still unclear.

One thing was for certain, the fact that the Vertex were the enemy of mankind, and that the local gods were lending their powers in order to protect the people.

-"In that case...Why don't those gods go fight them..."

Chikage mumbled while watching.

Tamako was the one to answer her.

-"Maybe they did fight them. Remember, before the attack an earthquake or natural disaster would occur. I think that was the result of the gods going at it"

-"...."

Chikage looked unsatisfied as she went silent.



Next up was combat training. Hinata alone was taken to a different place for her Miko training.

-"Aah~; The sight of Wakaba-chan engrossed in her training...her sparkling sweat and flustered skin...I want to add it all to my Wakaba-chan collection..."

Hinata always says while looking disappointed, but she of course wouldn't disobey orders for such a selfish reason.

The training menu was varied, from exercises to build up stamina to basic teachings of martial arts and even zen meditation to strengthen the mind.

Ever since that day 3 years ago, Wakaba and the others haven't fought any Vertex, but eventually, in order to take the world back from them the battle can not be avoided. There was also a high possibility Shikoku would be attacked soon. Preparations for a fight were of the utmost necessity.

Morning period has ended, and it was time for lunch break. The 6 always headed to the cafeteria together.

Wakaba was the one who suggested they always ate lunch together this way; It could be a great help in improving their teamwork.

Chikage and Tamako slightly objected at first. Chikage preferred eating alone, while Tamako didn't want rules applied to her mealtime as well. But when Yuuna said "Meals always taste better when eaten together!", Tamako let out a better smile while Chikage said "If Takashima-san says so..." and both ended up agreeing.

There were adults as well in the cafeteria. The teachers in charge of the girls' education, and members of the organisation given full authority by the government to deal with the Vertex, "Taisha". "Taisha" was written with the characters for "Great Shrine", and has been publicly active ever since the start of the invasion.





Each of the girls served herself and they all gathered at a single table. They were not charged for their food.

Although it was a self-serve format, they all ended up with Udon on their plates; the toppings differed however.

-"The meal after training tastes the best!"

Yuuna said with a carefree smile, as she slurped her Udon.

Chikage looked at her pleasantly.

-"Hey, Anzu. Watch your manners"

Anzu was reading a book while eating, Tamako then snatched it away from her.

-"Aah! But I was just getting to the good part..."

Anzu let out a sad voice. The book she was reading was a Shoujo novel aimed at mid-high schoolers. She loved reading and always had a book stuffed in her pocket.

-"No buts. Finish your meal, then you can have it back"

-"Fi~ne..."

Anzu gave up and went back to her Udon.

-"...Still, why do we have to go through training every single say"

Tamako said grumbling.

-"It's because only heroes have a chance against the Vertex..."

-"I know that, Hinata. But normal middle school girls usually hang out with their friends...Or fall in love or something. That's the kind of life they should be leading, no?"

Tamako sighed to herself.

-"This is an extreme emergency situation. Having our freedom slightly limited can't be helped."

Tamako crossed her arms, not convinced by Wakaba's answer.

-"Hmmm...."

-"If we refuse to cooperate, mankind will meet its doom. We have to become the spears that prot-"

-"I know! I am fully aware, but still"

Tamako raise her voice, then immediately looked down and mumbled.

-"...I'm sorry..."

-"Tamacchi-senpai..."

Anzu grabbed the edge of Tamako's uniform and looked up to her. Her eyes, filled with anxiety.

The scene went completely silent.

Wakaba understood what Tamako was going through. She wasn't speaking out of selfishness nor discontent. She was feeling anxious. The battle against Vertex was full of danger. If it came down to it, it was uncertain if they could even survive...Rather, the probability of them losing their lives in the process was higher. Three years ago, if Hinata weren't present during the time of the battle, Wakaba might have died then and there.

(Doi probably fears for Iyojima's safety more than her owns...)

Wakaba thought as she looked at Tamako.

Iyojima Anzu wasn't particularly good at sports, and had the worst results when it came to martial arts training. In battle, she would be the highest candidate to lose her life.

The one who broke the heavy silence was Yuuna.

-"Thanks for the food! It was great as always!"

She put the bowl, completely empty on the table; Yuuna then joined her hands and looked around at everyone at the table.

-"What's with the long faces, everyone?"

-"...Takashima...Haven't you been listening?"

-"Eh, ahh...Sorry Wakaba-chan! the Udon was so good that I completely lost track of my surroundings..."

Everyone then let out a sigh.

-"Eeeh?! what was that for?!"

Yuuna looked around at everyone.

-"Everything is gonna be fine. We're all strong to begin with, if we all do our best we'll definitely succeed!"

She said with a smile.

After lunch, walking alone in the corridor, Wakaba whispered to Hinata.



-"Perhaps...I'm not fit to be the leader"

-"What makes you say that?"

-"I tend to force my thoughts on everyone else, which usually causes opposition to arise disrupting the balance of the group. Someone like Takashima is much more suited for the role than I..."

-"EI!"

Hinata held Wakaba in her arms, interrupting her words.

-"Hi-Hinata?!"

-"What are you whining about, that's so unlike you Wakaba-chan. You're doing a perfectly fine job being leader"

-"..."

Hinata's words echoed through her heart. She didn't know if that were really the case.

After school, Wakaba headed to the broadcasting room. She was waiting for Shiratori to pick up, but there was no answer no matter how much she called Nagano.

As the sun went down, the call finally went through.

-"Sorry....bzzzt...-san. I had som....bzzt....ake care of"

There was a lot of static. The line was unstable.

-"Don't sweat it, did something happen over there?"

-"This afternoon, there was a battle against the Vertex"

-"...How's the damage?"

-"There were no problems...bzzzt...The enemy was driven back. there were no casualities"

-"I see..."

Wakaba let out a sigh of relief after hearing the noise-filled report. She only spoke to Shiratori through this radio, but she was a dear and irreplaceable friend to her. She truly was thankful that both she and Nagano were safe.

-"How's the situation at Shikoku?"

-"Same as always, so far no attacks. We spent the day training and attending classes"

-"I s....bzzzt.....I'm relieved"

Wakaba told Shiratori about what happened during lunch today. The uneasiness everyone's feeling and the nature of her relationship with the others...She thought Shiratori might provide her with some useful advice.

-"I see...I also used to have the same worries at first, but you eventually stop thinking about such things.....bzzzt.....Reality is much more heavy than thoughts, and forces us to make certain decisions"

Shiratori sounded as if those words were meant for her as well.

The days passed by without any major changes.

Wakaba and the others went to classes and received their Hero and Miko training as usual.

Once in a while, someone would display a hint of discomfort or uneasiness, but it had no impact on their daily lives.

The noise-filled calls to Nagano also continued.

-"We're getting nowhere constantly arguing about Udon and Soba...bzzzt...Let's talk about a different specialty today"

-"very well, we here at Marugame in Kagawa, have Honetsukitori, a dish that'll have anyone who tasted it once get addicted to it."

-"Fufufu, Nagano has Shinshuumiso whose name resounds throughout all of Japan...!"

Training at school is the same as always.

Contact with Nagano was also kept regularly.

However, there were days where the line would be so unstable, or completely unusable. The amount of static also increased which made the interchange harder and harder.

A few weeks later, the situation at Nagano became decisive.

-"I'm sorry, The line....bzzzt....bad.....bzzzt...."

The noise was rather high that day; from the way she spoke, a slight hint of exhaustion could be felt from Shiratori's voice.

-"What's wrong? Did something happen?"

-"...No, I just had to fight a rather persistent Vertex...bzzzt....ack seems to have damaged the radio...bzzzt.....might not be able to talk for a while.....bzzzzt....I'm sure you also have your fair share of worries, but do your best....bzzzt.....everything will be okay. I also thought it was an impossible task at first.....bzzzt....was able to keep on going for two more years....bzzzzt....."



-"Shiratori-san?! Can you hear me?!!"

After a long wave of noise

-"...Nogi-san, the rest is in your hands"

Those were the final words before the line completely shut.

Wakaba gazed at the sea from the inner keep of the Marugame castle.

The sun was setting at the edge of the horizon. Its color changed from a crimson red to a dark purple.

-"Wakaba-chan, this is where you've been"

Hinata hurried to her side.

-"I've been looking for you. They said you haven't gone home yet even though it's this late...Have you been talking to Shiratori-san?"

-"...The call was interrupted. I tried calling back many times, but it seems the line itself became unusable..."

-"...."

Hinata was at a loss for words.

She could easily imagine what Wakaba meant by that.

-"It's over...for Nagano"

Wakaba said nothing, she silently gave a nod.

She held her sword so strongly that her hand hurt.

The Vertex took yet another precious thing from Wakaba.

Suddenly, Wakaba's phone made a ringing noise, like an alarm.

The distant waves in the sea, the boats crossing the water, the cicadas' cries, the leaves swaying in the wind...All came to a stop.

Standing next to Wakaba, Hinata also seemed to be frozen in place.

-"...?!"

Wakaba immediately looked at her phone. Displayed on the screen were the words "Forestize warning".

Forestization...A phenomenon that occurred the moment a Vertex stepped inside the barrier.

Wakaba learned about it in class.

Ever since Shinju put up the wall around Shikoku, it would occur in order to protect the people inside.

-"They finally came...The Vertex..."

After destroying Nagano, it was now Shikoku's turn as the final shelter of mankind.
The sight in front of Wakaba's eyes was rapidly changing. The land, buildings, cars and people were covered by gigantic tree roots and ivies extending all the way to edge of the sea.

(Shiratori-san, people from Nagano...Your pain, sorrow, anger...I'll definitely make the Vertex pay the price for them. Everything is worthy of reward, that is the way of life of the Nogi.)

Wakaba drew her sword, and pointed it beyond the sea.

-"I have taken over the duty of protecting mankind from Nagano. We, heroes of Shikoku will intercept the enemy atop this Marugame castle!!"

Chapter 2 - end.

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME THREE!!
03

NOVEL



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

SILENT WORLD

著：ごぉ　イラスト：空中幼彩

アウトロー・ワンダーランド-0-

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・原画：
saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

CONTENTS

003

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

025

アウトロー・ワンダーランド-0-

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・原設：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

043

SILENTWORLD

著：ごお
イラスト：空中幼彩

DENGEKI G's NOVEL

電撃G's magazine 2015年11月号付録
[DENGEKI G's NOVEL]



I was shaking and couldn't move.

Perhaps somewhere in my mind, I thought

that a battle couldn't happen.

But still, they came.

The battle has begun.

The heroes were given weapons.

Exclusive weapons imbued with the power of the gods, the heroes' battle outfits,

and...

A "trump card" for fighting especially strong enemies.

But it would [redacted]

the [redacted].

Hero Record Sep 2018 AD

Iyojima Anzu's Record


第三話
開花
vol.3
Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JW WORKS
Supervision by Project 2H
企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JW WORKS
監修／Project 2H
©2014 Project 2H
乃木若葉は勇者である



The first ones to notice the Vertexes were launching an attack on Shikoku was the armed fleet staffed by former Self-defence Forces personnel that had the outside of the Seto Inland Sea "wall" under 24-hour surveillance.

Grotesque creatures were gathering at the wall in droves.

The armed fleet fired everything they had in an all-out bombardment to protect Shikoku.

However-- the modern weapons said to be the culmination of the blood and knowledge of countless men were unable to even scratch the Vertexes.

The armed fleet was forced to retreat, and chased down to the wall.

A group of Vertexes then slipped through the barrier wall, invading Shikoku.

The fleet chased down the invading Vertexes, but--

Having sensed the enemy invasion, the Shinju had already activated forestization within Shikoku.

As Wakaba peeked around the forestized Shikoku, she activated her smart-phone's hero-exclusive app.

Her body was enveloped in light and the clothes she was wearing transformed--

They became her heroes' battle outfit. An outfit imbued with the Shinju's power, remarkably boosting the physical ability of those who wore it. Further enveloping one's body in the power of the gods made one's attacks effective against Vertexes even without an exclusive weapon.

The counter-Vertex organization known as the Taisha (Grand Shrine) had researched the Shinju's power and discovered a scientific and magic method of utilizing it. The outfit was a result of that research. It was the culmination of the Shinju's blessing and the knowledge of mankind.

The battle outfits varied from hero to hero, but Wakaba's was characterized by the contrast of clean blue and white, reminiscent of a kikyou.

Once transformed, Wakaba stuck her sword into the ground and stared intensely at the Seto Inland Sea.

-"Wakaba-chaaan!"

When Wakaba turned towards that voice, she saw Yuuna and Chikage running towards her. Yuuna had tekkou (hand and wrist guards) while Chikage had a scythe like a death god's. Just as Wakaba had a sword, those two had those as their weapons.

-"Haah, haah... Time suddenly stopped, and then all around, these huge vine like things popped out of nowhere, like, gwaaahh! It really shocked me! I'm so glad I was able to figure out where everyone was thanks to the map...!"

Yuuna tried to catch her breath as she pointed out the map on her smart-phone screen to Wakaba. The locations of the heroes and the Vertexes were each indicated on the map by a coloured dot.

-"Wait, Wakaba-chan, you've already transformed!?"

Yuuna looked surprised as if she had only just now noticed.

-"Be ready for the battlefield at all times. I always carry my sword so I can fight whenever necessary."

-"It's really like you to be so serious and responsible like that, huh Wakaba... I gotta learn from your example!"

Yuuna clenched her fist and looked at Wakaba with a genuine look of admiration.

-"Takashima-san... I think you're fine the way you are..."

Chikage muttered as if she were speaking to herself before looking around and frowning.

-"But still... this is forestization, huh..."

The land of Shikoku in its entirety had become covered in the same plant structures that composed the wall.

When forestization happens, all time inside of Shikoku stops. All living and non-living things get covered and assimilated into the vegetation. The few things that remain in their original form are the Marugame Castle, the Seto Ohashi Bridge, electrical towers, high-rise buildings and other such large-scale structures.

Living things assimilated into the Jukai will receive no damage from Vertex attacks. And heroes are the only ones who retain their original form and can move during forestization.

(I did hear information about forestization before, but--)

As Wakaba looked around at the sight of the transformed Shikoku, a stern expression formed on her face.

It was too unreal a transfiguration.

It was almost like a spirit world.

Yuuna touched one of the vines growing nearby.

-"I've never seen such a huge plant. This is the Shinju-sama's doing too, isn't it...?"

-"Yeah. Forestization is an emergency protective measure made by the Shinju."

It is said that the protective wall and barrier around Shikoku are still incomplete.

In the event that Vertexes group together and invade Shikoku, the Shinju makes a bold move to weaken part of the barrier, allowing them to pass in. The Shinju does this because the constant strengthening of the barrier to protect against Vertex invasions would end up wasting spiritual power.

If the Shinju were to exhaust its power, then the people in Shikoku would lose the ability to live. While Shikoku was a closed world, it was able to remain self-sufficient in energy and materials thanks to the blessing of the Shinju's spiritual power.

Therefore, it was the heroes' role to repulse the Vertexes that had gotten into Shikoku.
And while the Vertexes were invading, the Shinju utilized forestization to protect the people--

(But the defence of forestization isn't perfect...)

Wakaba mentally whispered to herself as if to raise her conviction.

If part of the Jukai were to get damaged by an attack, then that damage would be fed back into the real world in the form of a natural disaster or an incident of unknown origin.



In short, the longer forestization went on, the more it would consume the Shinju's power.

Therefore, they had to annihilate the Vertexes as quickly as they could and end forestization.

-"Hey! Guys!"

Tamako came running with a shout. She was dragging Anzu along by the hand behind her.

-"Sorry we're late!"

Tamako had a circular disk with sharp blades attached to it-- a bladed yo-yo [旋刃盤, Senjinban, called a "Spinner" in Dynasty Warriors].

Anzu had a weapon resembling a rapid-fire crossbow.

-"That's everyone, huh. ... Guess this is our first battle. Let us take down the accursed Vertexes with our own hands."

Wakaba addressed the four other heroes on her team.

They would make those bastards pay for suffering they caused humanity.

-"That's fine and all, but... naturally that means you'll be the one leading the charge... against those monsters, right? I mean, you are the leader..."

Chikage spoke quietly as she threw Wakaba a glance that seemed to be testing her.

The atmosphere between them clouded over in gloom.

-"It's not an issue of who leads the charge. Let's just all fight together, right? Isn't that what teamwork's all about?"

The one who butted in with an exasperated tone was Tamako.

-"Teamwork..."

Chikage muttered as if chewing on that word before looking at Anzu.

Anzu's body trembled. She looked pale.

She was afraid--

-"Iyojima-san... Can you fight?"

-"..."

Anzu hung her and gave no answer. She couldn't answer.

-"Doi-san, you two were late in getting here... Was it because Iyojima-san felt too afraid to move out...? And you guys talk about teamwork... You have no room to talk..."

At Chikage's words, Anzu shut her eyes tightly and clenched her fists. But even so, the fear that caused her to tremble would not fade away.

-"And that's to say nothing of..."

-"Koori-san, you've said too much."

Wakaba interrupted Chikage and glared at her sharply. Chikage merely looked away in disinterest.

(Koori-san did say too much... but Iyojima's current state certainly isn't looking good.)

Wakaba looked at Anzu.

-"Iyojima. I understand why you'd be afraid, but unless we fight, humanity is at risk of destruction. Chin up."

-"I-I'm sorry..."

Tears formed in Anzu's eyes.

-"Wakaba, that's enough, isn't it?"

Tamako stood between Wakaba and Anzu as if to protect the latter girl.

Seeing those three like that made Chikage squint her eyes at them cynically.

-"It's the duty of a commander to raise their troop's morale... Nogi-san... Could this situation be the result... of your lack of a leader's disposition...?"

-"...!"

Those words struck a nerve with Wakaba. Wakaba herself wasn't confident that she was the appropriate choice for the role of leader.

The atmosphere engulfing the heroes became thicker and thicker. It was Yuuna who spoke up as if to blow away that atmosphere.

-"Guys, I know it's important that we're all getting along, but let's leave the talking for later!"

-"""Getting along???"""

Wakaba, Anzu, and Chikage's voices overlapped as they looked at Yuuna.

-"Yup. They say it takes good friends to argue with each other, don't they?"

-"""No, that's wrong."""

All three of them gave Yuuna the same retort at the same time.

-"All three of you denied me without a second thought!"

Yuuna was in shock.

-"Umm, uh, Yuuna-san... I think that's wrong too."

-"You too, Anzu-chan!?"

That was the final blow.

-"Uuugh..."



Despite taking the damage from everyone giving her the same retort, Yuuna pulled herself together and spoke resolutely.

-"--But anyway, the Vertexes are the cause behind your argument, and they'll be right there real soon. They're your real enemy."

Wakaba gasped at Yuuna's words.

(... She's right. Finding fault among ourselves and getting frustrated will just distract us from the real problem. We should focus our frustration on the bastards who brought us this situation in the first place.)

Tamako and Chikage awkwardly looked each other in the face.

-"Well, that is true."

"It's just as Takashima-san said... right?"

Anzu was still afraid, but--

(It doesn't matter. If Iyojima can't fight, then I'll just fight enough to make up for her. That's what it means to be a leader.)

Wakaba felt the weight of her sword in her hands as she made up her mind.

-"Okay, then guess it's time for Tama and everyone else to get pumped up!"

The other four girls besides Wakaba took out their cell phones and tapped the app.

-"We'll all be heroes who get along!"

As if Yuuna's shout were the signal, the clothes the four of them wore each began to transform.

Yuuna's battle outfit was pink, reminiscent of a yamazakura--

Chikage's battle outfit was red, reminiscent of a higanbana--

Tamako's battle outfit was orange, reminiscent of a himeyuri--

But Anzu alone did not transform. The power wielded by a hero was largely affected by their mental state. Without a firm will and the preparedness to fight, the hero's battle outfit could not be worn.

-"..."

Chikage looked on silently at Anzu, who was unable to transform.

-"... I-I'm sorry... I..."

As tears formed in Anzu's eyes, Tamako patted her on the shoulder in encouragement.

-"Don't sweat it! Tama and the others will take 'em all down."

-"... okay..."

Anzu nodded sadly.

Wakaba used her smart-phone map to confirm the Vertexes numbers and movement.

Around 50 had invaded the barrier. The Vertexes were headed straight for them. The Vertexes' characteristic movement pattern was essentially that they started by targeting humans. In the forestized Shikoku, the only humans were Wakaba and the other heroes. Therefore, the Vertexes headed straight for them.

At the limit of Wakaba's sight, she saw the group of Vertexes in the distance. Their distance was approximately 3 km... 2 km...

-"Koori-san. I'm sorry for saying such impertinent things earlier. I should let my actions speak rather than my words, shouldn't I?"

Wakaba said that to Chikage before leaping into the air, sword in hand. She negated an entire kilometre's distance in a single bound, closing in on the enemy forces.

-"Rrrrooooohhhh!!"

With a flash of her sword's white blade as it left its sheath, Wakaba split the Vertex at the head of the group cleanly in two. Before the bisected Vertex vanished, Wakaba used its remains as a springboard to leap into the air once more. She sliced another of the monsters down the middle.

Wakaba's current level of iaigiri far outstripped the level she was at three years ago in sharpness, speed, and efficiency. It was the result of her physical growth, the battle outfit she received from the Shinju, and her hard practice all intertwined.

As she cut down the endless swarm of Vertexes, Wakaba shouted as if to have her voice reach all of Shikoku.

-"Heroes!! Follow me!!"

Wakaba, a single knight, leaped into the enemy masses, slaughtering Vertex after Vertex.

As she watched those deeds from behind, Tamako couldn't stop the words from leaking out of her lips.

-"Man, that Wakaba's... pretty damn cool..."

But Tamako became irritated at her own words. She thought "What the hell am I doing watching her in admiration? Am I gonna let her do everything herself?"

-"Well, I'm gonna go start too!"

Following after Wakaba, Yuuna leapt towards the Vertexes as well.

Tamako gave a glance to the still-fearful Tamako and told her

-"Stay right here, Anzu. We'll go beat them all and come back, okay!?"
before flying off.



-"Haah!!"

As she took a deep breath and exhaled, Yuuna's fists punched into a Vertex's body with the speed of the the wind and the weight of solid rock.

Yuuna's exclusive weapons were tekkou. All of the weapons held by the heroes were either artefacts dedicated at shrines, or things otherwise modified from such artefacts. And they were all imbued with spiritual power derived from the gods of the land of various places.

Vertexes gathered around Yuuna, surrounding her. But she still remained calm.

For the past three years, Yuuna had been thoroughly trained even further in striking martial arts so that she could effectively use her weapons. Karate. Kempo. Boxing...

-"Teyaaahhh!"

Yuuna's fist struck a gigantic Vertex's body.

One step behind Yuuna, Tamako approached the group of Vertexes as well.

-"Leave this one for Tama!"

Tamako's weapon was a bladed yo-yo. Unlike Wakaba's sword and Yuuna's fists, it had the advantage of being able to attack enemies from a certain distance.

Tamako swung her arm in a wide arch. Her yo-yo spun its blade into a Vertex, tearing it apart. Tamako then pulled the wire to bring it back to her hands.

-"Easy!"

In Tamako's eyes, defeating the Vertexes also meant protecting Anzu.

Her birthplace was near Anzu's, and even in the Vertexes' initial invasion three years ago, Tamako had fought while protecting Anzu.

-"I'll beat them all and not let a single one get anywhere near Anzu!"

She threw her bladed yo-yo once more, slaughtering a Vertex.

But-- at that time, Tamako's wasn't necessarily 100% vigilant.

After all, she had won against a Vertex three years ago, and now with her bladed yo-yo, she was beating enemy after enemy.

Now that she was actually fighting the Vertexes, she couldn't help but think somehow that they were no match for her.

She soon learned what a simple mistake that was.

If Tamako threw her bladed yo-yo far, it would take time for it to come back. During that time, she had no means of opposing the Vertexes.

The enemy could not let such an opportunity pass. The Vertexes used the gap between Tamako's bladed yo-yo throws to surround her.

-"...gh"

She tried to escape, but the Vertexes blocked her path of retreat.

There was some distance between her and both Yuuna and Wakaba. She couldn't expect either of them to be able to save her.

-"No way..."

Her composure took a complete nosedive, and she could feel death thrust before her throat.

A Vertex drew in on Tamako voraciously.

-"... This can't be happening. Not this easily..."

Would she die?

Though she was a hero, one wrong step could spell death for her.

After all, this was a battlefield.

-"Dammit...!"

Tamako shut her eyes--

But her life did not end there.

When she reopened her eyes, there were countless golden arrows piercing into the Vertex's body.

The fatally wounded white monster began to vanish.

-"Tamacchi-senpai..."

When she turned towards the voice, she saw Anzu with her crossbow at the ready. She was clad in a white battle outfit reminiscent of a stock flower.

-"Anzu... that outfit..."

-"I... was able to transform. When I thought that you were in trouble, Tamacchi-senpai, when I thought I needed to save you, the app activated..."

There were still some tears in Anzu's eyes. But she was no longer shaking.

Tamako grabbed the bladed yo-yo that finally returned and gave Anzu an unyielding smile.

-"Thanks! Tama's gonna stay in front, so cover for me, okay, Anzu!?"

- "Yeah!"



Anzu nodded and readied her crossbow. A weapon with even more specialized at ranged attacks than Tamako's bladed yo-yo.

While the rest of the heroes were struggling against the Vertex horde-- there was just one who remained in the rear without acting.

Koori Chikage.

She was not merely watching disinterestedly.

She paralyzed with fear.

She was able to transform.

She had a weapon that could oppose the enemy. And yet she didn't move.

Just like with Anzu, this was Chikage's first fight with the Vertexes as well. Vertexes had not appeared in the area she was in when she awoke as a hero three years ago.

-"Ugh... ugh..."

She was tormented by impatience, frustration, and feelings of alienation.

She had thought that Anzu was more afraid than she was, yet Anzu had just charged into the battlefront.

Chikage was the oldest, yet she was losing even to Anzu who was the youngest.

Chikage had really only found fault with Anzu as a knee-jerk reaction to her own fears.

-"Gun-chan!"

At that moment, she saw Yuuna running towards her.

-"Takashima... san?"

One Yuuna had stopped in front of her, Chikage was able to tell see scratches here and there on her body. Most likely wounds she had incurred from fighting the Vertexes. And yet Yuuna was less concerned about herself, and more concerned with Chikage who hadn't participated in the battle at all.

-"Are you okay, Gun-chan?"

-"I-... I'm... sorry... for being too scared to fight... How could I have said all those things to Iyojima-san... when I can't even fight myself...?"

Yuuna held her hand out to Chikage with a reassuring smile.

-"Don't make that face. I'm right beside you."

-"Takashima... san..."

Chikage took Yuuna's hand.

-"Let's go. Hold on tight!"

Chikage leapt with Yuuna with and let her lead the way.

Chikage was bewildered at her inhuman ability to jump hundreds of meters in a single bound.

(This... is the hero's power...)

As she sped through the air with nothing to support her, Yuuna's hand in hers was all she could truly believe in.

One Vertex headed towards the two of them.

-"Watch, Gun-chan--"

Yuuna clenched her free hand into a solid fist.

-"--We can fight. Humans won't lose to the likes of them!"

Wielded by human will, the fist of divine power pulverized the Vertex that came after them in a single blow.

But immediately afterward, another Vertex approached them.

-"Gun-chan, believe in your own power. I know you can do it!"

Chikage looked at the scythe she held.

(If Takashima-san's by my side... then I can fight.)

Chikage swung her scythe. The fact that Chikage could swing the human-height weapon with her slender arm was in itself proof of divine power. The giant blade she swung cleaved the Vertex in two right before her eyes.

-"I... I did it..."

She couldn't believe her own strength. But the physical feedback she felt from cutting the enemy was unmistakably real.

-"Wow! That's the spirit!"

Yuuna's words of praise made Chikage happy more than anything.

Three more Vertexes approached from the front.

-"Gun-chan, onto the next ones!"

-"Yeah...!"

Yuuna and Chikage let go of each other's hands. Yuuna took out the left Vertex with a single punch. Meanwhile, Chikage eliminated the other two Vertexes with one swing of her scythe.

After defeating her third Vertex, Chikage was now confident of her own power.

(... I'm... stronger than the Vertexes...)

She was no longer afraid of the enemy. In fact, her fear had turned into rage.

(I can't believe... I was afraid of these things...!)

-"Watch, Gun-chan."



Chikage gasped and looked where Yuuna was pointing. There, she could see Wakaba fighting the Vertexes. Compared to Tamako and Anzu, and Yuuna and Chikage, who were each teaming up to fight the Vertexes two on one, Wakaba was rushing the deepest into the Vertex horde and taking on the most enemies at once.

Each time she unsheathed her sword in iaigiri, another Vertex was cut and vanished. The intensity of Wakaba's fighting was extraordinary even from the perspective of Chikage and the other heroes who ere already far more powerful than human beings.

-"I think it's thanks to Wakaba-chan leading the charge like this and attracting the attention of all the enemies that the rest of us can fight like this. Wakaba-chan really is amazing. So Gun-chan... do you think you mind acknowledging her abilities too?"

-"..."

Chikage gave no answer.

Seeing Wakaba fighting on the front lines made Chikage feel just a little bit bitter.

By the time they had cut down a fifth of the enemy's numbers, the Vertexes movements began to change. Several individual Vertexes gathered into one place.

They began to "evolve".

The same thing had happened in the Vertexes' initial raid three years ago.

When a formidable enemy appears, several Vertexes fuse, giving birth to a single, stronger Vertex. Three years ago, Wakaba was unable to cross swords with such a fused Vertex.

And now.

The Vertexes began fusing into a cylindrical shape.

Tamako and Anzu looked at the fusing Vertexes from a distance.

-"What is that...?"

Tamako tilted her head.

They had heard about evolved Vertexes formed from fusion in lectures, but they had never actually seen one in real life. No evolved Vertexes appeared among the ones they fought three years ago.

Evolved Vertexes were said to have power incomparable to those of the ordinary ones. However, the cylindrical shaped Vertex didn't look strong at all. It even lacked the teeth that its original form possessed.

-"First, I'll...!"

Anzu aimed her crossbow at the Vertex of unknown nature. When she pulled the trigger, the crossbow shot out arrows that traced golden arks through the air as they chased after the enemy.

The next moment, the cylindrical Vertex began forming a clear red plate-shaped structure.

-"!?"

Anzu's arrows struck the plate-shaped structure and reversed in trajectory. The arrows imbued with divine power were now coming back at their original owner, Anzu.

-"Oh no!"

Tamako transformed her bladed yo-yo into a large shield and struck down the arrows heading towards Anzu.

They would have mortally wounded Anzu had they hit.

-"Th-thank you, Tamacchi-senpai."

-"Now we're even. ... Anyway, I guess that thing's some kind of reflective plate, huh..."

If the plate was able to reflect Anzu's arrows back with such accuracy, then throwing Tamako's bladed yo-yo at it would probably yield the same results. Projectiles weren't very effective here. Should Tamako directly attack it with her bladed yo-yo's blades at close range? But would blades be effective against an opponent that was immune to arrows--?

As Tamako pondered, one girl thrust at the enemy with a single fist.

It was Takashima Yuuna.



-*"Hero puuuuunch!!"*

Yuuna struck the evolved Vertex's reflective plate with her fist.

But her fists that had pulverized normal Vertexes in one blow didn't even scratch this enemy.

-"If one hit won't work... then I just gotta keep hitting it ten, a hundred, a thousand times more!"

Yuuna mustered all of her willpower. All to use the trump card they had worked out for fighting fierce evolved Vertexes.

The hero's existence is connected to the Shinju. All things on the surface are stored within the Shinju as conceptual records. One can access those records, extract them, and cause their power to manifest in one's own body--

Out of the infinite records available to her, the one Yuuna now chose was "Ichimokuren". The fairy embodying wind and storms.

Ichimokuren bestowed Yuuna's fist with the power and might of a tornado.

Her hero outfit transformed as well.

-"One Thousand... Consecutive Hero Puuunches!"

When tornadoes intensify, they can keep spewing winds for dozens of minutes intense enough to destroy steel-reinforced concrete structures. Their might is said to match those of nuclear weapons.

Yuuna's incessantly pounded her fist that had gained the power of a tornado into the plate-shaped structure. Once she had surpassed 800 punches, a crack ran through the plate, and after 900 punches, the crack had spread throughout the entirety of the plate. By the thousandth punch, the evolved Vertex had been smashed into pieces.

Wakaba held her own against the other normal Vertexes as she watched Yuuna's fight.

The hero's "trump card" carried a huge burden on the body.

Therefore, the Taisha had told them to use it as little as possible. Wakaba had intended to be the one to use it when the time necessitated it.

-"... Dammit, Yuuna..."

Wakaba thought to herself--

These past three years, the Vertexes had set their sights on Nagano as their target for invasion, and as a result, Shikoku lived in peace. In that short time allotted to them, Wakaba and the others had persisted in anti-Vertex training. The hero battle outfits were created. They had worked out offensive measures that utilized the power of the Shinju.

(Shiratori-san, citizens of Nagano... It's thanks to you that our power got through to the Vertexes. The result of today's battle is all thanks to you.)

As Wakaba took a moment of silence to meditate, a Vertex attacked her.

Her reaction came a moment late--



crunch *tear*!

-"... Gross. That's not very palatable."

The one who took the hit wasn't Wakaba, but the Vertex instead.

Wakaba had dodged the Vertex's charge with the least necessary movement, and at the same time, she bit off part of the enemy's body with her teeth.

She swallowed down the Vertex meat and cleaved the enemy in two.

Upon seeing Wakaba take a bite out of the Vertex, Tamako and Anzu's faces stiffened.

-"Tama's gonna try not to piss off Wakaba anymore..."

-"Y-yeah... I think that'd be for the best."

-"Wakaba-chan! You can't go eating weird things like that, okay!?"

After all the Vertexes had been swept away and the battle was over,

After forestization had ended and Marugame Castle had returned to its original sight,

Wakaba was forced to sit in the proper Seiza position within the castle walls. Hinata was scolding her.

-"But..."

-"No buts!"

-"But they ate my friends in the past. So I wanted to give them some payback... You know, a reward for everything, and all..."

-"What if it gave you an upset stomach!?"

-"Ugh... mm..."

Wakaba had nothing to say in reply.

Yuuna, Tamako, Anzu, and Chikage watched on from the sidelines.

-"Wakaba-san was fiercer than a demon, but now she's..."

When Anzu said that in a small voice, Tamako folded her arms and muttered "hmm".

-"So Hinata was the scariest..."

That night--

News of how the Vertexes invaded and were defeated by the heroes spread throughout Shikoku.

The people cheered in relief and joy at the victory.

At the same time, the communication records between Shikoku and Nagano were announced.

The truth that there were other people outside the wall who were also desperately resisting the Vertexes brought the power of hope to Shikoku's residents.

However, they could not tell them that communication with Nagano had ceased.

Wakaba and the others alone would know of the despair that befell Nagano.

Wakaba watched the news reports on TV as she ate soba alone.

-"... Shiratori-san, I still think that udon's better than soba. Soba's just... a little too salty for me."

Even after the battle, the lives of Wakaba and the others continued unchanged.

During lunch break the next day, while everyone was eating together, Tamako spoke up.

-"Hey, Wakaba. We've all been talking."

-"About what?"

Suspicion rose on Wakaba's face.

-"We think you really are the best choice for leader. The Taisha's always been saying you should be the leader, but after that battle, I can clearly see why."

-"... What's this all of a sudden?"

-"Well, you see, in that last battle... It was because of you leading the charge that Tama and everyone else was able to fight. If it weren't for you... We'd all be heavily injured... or maybe even dead."

After the battle had ended, Wakaba had single-handedly taken down two thirds of the Vertexes. If it weren't for her hard fighting, Anzu and Chikage would possibly have been in danger.

Anzu also leaned forward and joined in on what Tamako was saying.

-"I think it's best you're leader too, Wakaba-san!"

-"Yeah, yeah. You really do seem the most like a leader too, Wakaba-chan."

Yuuna smiled wholeheartedly.

-"... I don't object. Your efforts certainly did play a major role. ...And Takashima-san says you have the qualities of a leader too, after all."

Chikage mumbled without looking at Wakaba.

-"..."



Wakaba looked everyone in the eye--

-"... Thank you."

Before that point, she hadn't felt the conviction that it was okay for her to be leader.

But-- she decided to believe in the words of her friends.

-"Isn't that great, Wakaba-chan?"

Hinata looked at Wakaba with a smile.

-"By the way... Now that that's settled. Wakaba. There's something I've wanted to say to you."

Tamako looked at Wakaba with scornful eyes.

-"W-h-y do you call Tama by her last name? You call Yuuna 'Yuuna', don't you?"

-"Welp, that's cause I told her to call my by my first name earlier!"

Yuuna cheerfully answered Tamako's question.

When Wakaba first met Yuuna, she had called her "Takashima". And in response, she said "It'd be easier if you called me Yuuna!"

-"Mmm... In that case, call me 'Tamako', or if you want to be more familiar, you can call me 'Tamacchi' too."

Tamako spoke with a pout.

-"Actually, Tamacchi-senpai's been really bothered about why you don't call her by her first name, Wakaba-san."

-"What!? N-n-n-no I haven't! I haven't been bothered one bit!"

Tamako angrily denied Anzu's teasing words.

-"Oh, also, please call me by my first name too."

-"Anzu! You're just riding on what Tama said for your own advantage, aren't you!"

As she watched Tamako and Anzu's little exchange, Chikage murmured.

-"... I'm... I'm fine being called by my first name too."

-"""!?"""

Wakaba, Tamako, and Anzu each looked at Chikage in surprise.

-"What...? What's with those looks...?"

-"No, it's just, you said something a little unexpected, so..."

When Wakaba said that, Chikage looked the other way in annoyance. Her cheeks were slightly pink.

-"If everyone else is getting called by their first names... it'd be weird... if only I got called by my last name.

Also, I'd like you to quit it with the honorific speech... It's stuffy."

Wakaba nodded once she heard those words.

-"Okay, then from now on, I'll do that. Chikage, Tamako, Anzu."

--Was that what they called a promise?

Wakaba felt her heart growing warm.

-"Okay, then let's take a commemorative group photo!"

And with a smile on her whole face, Hinata took out her smart-phone.

-"Today marks the day of the Shikoku heroes' fresh start, as well as the day Wakaba-chan took up her new post as leader. ...Teehee. That's one more photo for my secret Wakaba-chan photo collection."

-"Hinata! You're still collecting photos for that!? One day I'll erase it for sure, okay!"

-"A secret photo collection? What's that?"

-"Sounds like fun! Hina-chan, let me see it too!"

-"Tamako, Yuuna! Don't show interest in it!"

-"I want to see it too!"

-"... Whatever..."

Hinata captured everyone's excitement in the cafeteria that day in a picture.

(Chapter 3 End)



DENGEKI G's

VOLUME FOUR!!
04

NOVEL



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい　イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

SILENTWORLD

著：ごぉ　イラスト：空中幼彩

アウトロー・ワンダーランド-0-

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・扉絵：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

CONTENTS

003

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

023

アウトロー・ワンダーランド-0-

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・扉絵：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

041

SILENTWORLD

著：ごお
イラスト：空中幼彩

DENGEKI G's NOVEL

電撃G's magazine 2015年12月号付録
［ DENGEKI G's NOVEL ］



Using that technique pretty much wears you out.

It's incredibly strong,

but I learned firsthand that it's not a technique

you can use over and over again in one battle.

We were told beforehand...

that the risk of the technique would exhaust stamina and cause fatigue,

but it was on a completely different level when I actually experienced it.

I got Ichimokuren to help me this time, but...

I kinda want to get stronger myself.

I want to try "[redacted]" some time.

Hero Record Oct 2018 AD

Takashima Yuuna's Record

第四話
―陰葉

vol.4

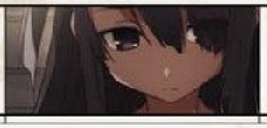
Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JW WORKS
Supervision by Project 2H



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい　イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JW WORKS
監修／Project 2H

©2014 Project 2H



Chapter 4: Shade Leaf

A single bus, driving down this road surrounded by fields.

Next to Chikage's seat is her special scythe, wrapped in cloth. It's been folded into a portable state.

She had taken a day off and went back to her hometown in Kouchi.

Staring at the scenery outside the window.

It's October already.

The autumn breeze blowing through the golden fields; mountains in the distance were also starting to turn red.

-"..."

Eventually, Chikage stopped looking out the window, took out a portable game device and turned it on.

An FPS where you shoot down attacking zombies and goat abominations.

Putting on her earphones, she stopped hearing the sound of the moving bus. Focused on the screen, she stopped paying attention the her surroundings.

Video games were Chikage's sole hobby.

Her gun shot down the enemies one after the other.

The dying monstrosities bled a red similar to humans.

Chikage's technique was astounding.

Even with starter gear, no recovery items and no saves allowed, she breezed through the levels.

-"People throughout Shikoku must know that I've been chosen as a hero by now..."

She recalled the first Vertex invasion to Shikoku that happened a few days ago.

After their first battle ended in victory, the existence of the "Heroes" that repelled the vertex was made public.

Taisha cooperated with the mass media and even helped promote the Heroes, as a way to reassure the people of Shikoku. Proving that humans can defeat the Vertex, the Heroes will protect everyone.

Over the next days, the five of them were featured on TV, newspapers, over the internet and even in weekly magazines with their real names revealed.

They became the centre of attention, and once they were revealed to be no more than young children; people all over Shikoku had their eyes on them.

The secret weapon of the nation.

The hope of mankind.

The final and strongest shield.

-"These magazines and newspapers have Wakaba-chan's interviews"

During lunch, Yuuna came to the cafeteria holding a bunch of magazines and newspapers. All of which featured special Hero articles, especially Wakaba being the leader, with a large picture.

-"What a show this has become..."

Anzu said, impressed as she took a magazine out of the stack.

Hinata looked at the page and said, as a wrinkle formed between her eyebrows.

-"Mmm, This won't do. This picture does not capture the appeal of Wakaba-chan. From now on I'll request they only use my best shots..."

-"Don't do it! Don't you dare!"

-"Are you just pretending, Wakaba-chan?"

Tamako looked at it next, then shrugged.

-"They are all writing what they please. We're neither a weapon, hope nor a shield, just human"

For a while, the Hero unveiling excitement continued like some sort of festival. The girls were allowed to take some time off afterwards.

The hero system is highly dependant on the mental state of the wielder, and can't be used in an unstable condition. Rest is very important.

Especially Yuuna who manifested the power of a fairy into her own body; she was hospitalized in order to investigate the after-effects.

The sound of the bus door opening could be heard through the earphones. Chikage looked up and noticed she had arrived at her destination.

She almost got a new high-score, but was forced to quit.

-"...I'm getting off..."

She put away her handheld, grabbed her scythe and got up.

A few minutes walk later, Chikage arrived at a one-story rented house. That was her home.

A foul smell hit her the moment she stepped inside.

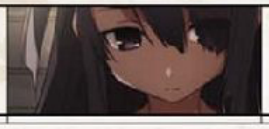
Dust was everywhere, and empty cans and bottles scattered all over the corridor.

Garbage bags piled up in a corner, likely forgotten there for weeks.

-"I'm home..."

No response.

She stepped inside avoiding the empty cans.



As she made it to the living room, she saw her mother wrapped up in a futon. Asleep after taking her medications.

Whitening hair, sunken eyes and withered thin skin...You wouldn't believe she was still in her thirties.

The door across the room opened and her father stepped in.

-"Chikage, you're home! It's been a while, how are you doing?"

Opening his arms wide and welcoming his daughter. The man had a bright expression, but he seemed fatigued.

The moment he saw the giant scythe she was holding, his expression stiffened and quickly switched back to that fake smile.

-"That's the Heroes'...It must have been rough"

Chikage couldn't tell what he meant by that. Was he talking about her fighting, or the fact that this commotion made her come all the way back carrying that heavy object.

-"More importantly, dad...At least clean up a bit. There's garbage all over the place"

-"Y-yeah. But you know I'm busy taking care of your mother"

Making up an excuse, he averted his eyes. The man can't do chores, nor does he try to.

-"I'm sorry, Chikage. To see your mother like this"

He looked down at the sleeping woman, sighing.

-"It's fine...I just had some time off"

The reason she came home was because of her mother's condition worsening.

After the first Vertex invasion, many people started manifesting what was known as the [Sky fear syndrome].

A psychological illness born from the immense fear of the monsters.

It was classified in 4 stages, depending on its severity.

Stage 1, being the lightest - its symptoms were just the fear of looking up and discomfort when going outside.

People suffering from stage 2 and above would have flashbacks to the time of the attack, causing them to be mentally unstable and affecting their everyday life.

Up until recently, Chikage's mother was at stage 2, but her condition worsened and is now at stage 3. Making the flashbacks and hallucinations much more frequent, and need for medicine a lot more pressing. She of course still couldn't work nor go outside.

The final stage was the worst. Symptoms ranged from ego collapsing, memory loss to madness. It was so harsh that many people believe the Vertex emitted some sort of waves or poison that affected the human brain.

It was also said that by the time someone reached the third stage, it wouldn't take long for them to get to the final one.

Chikage's mother was soon to be moved into a special facility. That was why her father called her back home.

If it gets worse she might not even recognize her daughter anymore.

Chikage got angry at her father who did not even try to hide he was giving up, but she couldn't think of a reason to refuse.

-"Chikage, you haven't eaten lunch yet. I'll have something delive-"

-"It's okay...I don't want anything"

Cutting him mid-sentence. She turned around and proceeded to leave the room towards the front door.

-"Where are you going?"

-"Since I've come all the way here...I wanna go see my friends"

-"I see..."

Chikage felt he was trying to tell her something, but she ignored the fact and left.

-(I knew I shouldn't have come back...)

Walking down the narrow country path, Chikage regretted her decision.

Her wanting to see her friends was a mere excuse. There was no such person in this village.

She simply wanted to get away from there.

She hated that house.

She also hated the sight of her parents, broken and exhausted.

Why did it become this way.

When her parents were a loving couple.

Their families apparently protested, but they rented a small house and started living there.

Soon after Chikage was born.

Both parents rejoiced at the birth of their child.

A third member added to their small family, and their days of happiness continued.

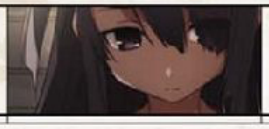
But that's not how it went.

Chikage's father was a child turned adult, being both an irresponsible father and husband.

He prioritized his own freedom and refused to help out with housework.

One night, Chikage's mother collapsed from a high fever. Chikage being too young to know what to do called her father asking for help. "Give her some medicine and put her to sleep", he said and hung up the phone. He finally returned at around 2am, drunk.

Chikage spent all that time crying alone.



Family in-fights happened regularly.

And one day, the mother's affair came to light.

Being in a small village, the news spread quickly and the couple's relations with the other residents became the worst they could be.

Chikage was not spared either. She couldn't stand all the people talking behind her back.

She was bullied and hated at school.

Soon after, the mother ran away with another man.

And yet, the couple still wouldn't split up.

They couldn't come to an understanding on who would take custody of Chikage, both wanting to push her onto the other.

If it weren't for her, they would have long left the past behind and started a new life.

They both cursed her existence.

-(I'm a worthless and upleasant child...)

Was how Chikage felt about herself.

She lived her life resented by her parents, despised by the other villagers and bullied by her peers.

And the day of the invasion.

When she awakened to her powers, she wasn't in an place that was attacked and never actually had to fight. But Taisha confirmed that she was chosen and had her move to Kagawa.

Things just sort of naturally happened afterwards. Taisha provided an explanation of what Heroes were, she then met a group of girls who were like her and transferred to a school under Taisha's jurisdiction.

A boarding school with only 6 students.

By the time she got used to her new lifestyle, and after all sorts of procedures were done, Chikage went back home just once.

Her mother was there. She was at Honshuu during the attack and barely managed to escape from the Vertex back to Shikoku. The man she ran away with was apparently killed.

-"Your mother has the Sky fear..."

Her father said with a gloomy expression.

He was referring to the Sky Fear syndrome. She was already at the second stage.

She couldn't go outside nor work. The scandal left them scorned by their families, so the father was the only one taking care of her. The people suffering from the illness were too numerous, so they couldn't admit Stage 2 and below into hospitals. The man was working part time and barely managing to scrap by due to the expenses of his wife's treatment.

-(...You reap what you sow...)

The Koori household was always confined and stifling.

Chikage hated that house.

She also hated the sight of her parents, broken and exhausted.

And above all, she hated her worthless and unpleasant self.

As she walked, drowned in her thoughts, she passed by her old school. Be it by force of habit, her feet simply carried her in that direction.

She had nothing but bad memories of this place.

No a single person took her side, she spent all her days looking down at her seat.

Her classmates used to call her [Daughter of the bitch] and [slut]. Most likely not even knowing the meaning of the words.

Even the teachers mocked her, saying a child born of those parents could never amount to anything.

Her belongings were stolen almost on a daily basis.

The girls would surround her, rip off her clothes and toss them in the incinerator.

At times they would cut her hair with scissors, hurting her ears in the process more often than not.

They would even push her down the stairs and mask it as playing.

Back then, the only way Chikage could protect herself was shutting her heart completely. One way she did that was by getting into video games. As she focused on the screen, closed her ears with earphones she was able to block off everything else.

That way, both the mocking voices and painful bullying couldn't reach her.

Unable to hear anything.

Unable to feel anything.

Unable to feel pain.

She simply waited for time to pass as she immersed herself in her games.

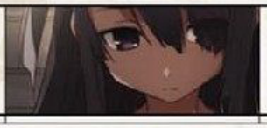
Worthless as she is, It was only natural for people to hurt her like that, or so she thought.

-[With parents like that]

-[Annoying]

-[Gloomy]

-[Let's burn it]



-[Ahahahaha!]

-[What happened to your clothes?]

-[Slut]

-[Crappy parents]

-[Disgusting hair]

-[Scissors]

-[Ah, messed up]

-[Blood!]

-[Ahahaha]

-[Sensei did not see anything]

-[Ahahahaha]

-[Stop playing video games]

-[Disgusting]

-[Stairs]

-[She fell]

-[Ambulance]

-[Run away]

-[Don't make trouble for sensei]

-[All because of those parents]

Unable to hear anything.

Unable to feel anything.

Unable to feel pain.

Nothing...

-"There is no way...it doesn't hurt..."

Chikage covered her ears, feeling pain from the spot that was previously cut by her classmates.

No matter how hard she focused on her game, she could still hear their voices. She could sense their malice. She could feel the pain.

She was always in pain, alone.

-"Why..."

Tears started forming in the corners of her eyes.

Why was she remembering this now. Back in Kagawa she had forgot about it all. She wished the memories from that time would disappear forever.

-(Let's go back...)

She turned her back on the school.

She didn't want to spend a single more moment in this place.

She wanted to go back to Kagawa right away.

-(I wanna see...Takashima-san...)

When she was getting used to that lifestyle. When she completely gave up on interacting with other people.

Yuuna nonchallantly spoke to her.

Once she's back to Kagawa.

Once she talks to Yuuna.

She'll completely forget about the past again.

-"You're...Koori-san?"

A voice said from behind. When Chikage turned around, the one standing there was her old female teacher. She smiled, looking slighly older than she used to.

-"What are you doing here? Everyone has already left for your house"

-"...? My...House?"

-"Yes, we received word that you were coming home"

Question after question rushed into Chikage's mind.

-(Everyone...? What...? Who...?)

The teacher took her hand, -"Come on, let's go" she said as she pulled her.

And lead her back to her house.

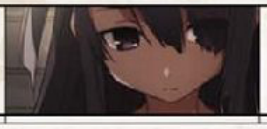
People were gathered in front of the building.

Completely confused.

As she approached, they gathered around her.

Even more confused.

What is even going on? The people looked at Chikage with admiration and respect.



And then they started talking.

The classmates who used to bully her, smiling as if trying to get on good side.

-"We're friends aren't we? You don't hate us right?"

The shop keepers from the shopping district who used to call her the daughter of the whore bowed their heads asking her to come visit their shops.

The neightbors who called her a creepy child are now saying she was the pride of their village.

A man calling himself the mayor said he would give her a medal of honor and asked for her permission to put up the pictures on the local magazines and homepage.

Chikage was dumbfounded at first, but she eventually realized the meaning of this charade.

-(Oh...So that's what this is...)

She hit the ground with the handle of her scythe, still wrapped up.

The sound of the impact echoed, and everyone around her went silent.

-"...I have something...To ask of you all"

With everyone's attention on her, Chikage said with a tiny voice.

-"Am I...A person of worth...?"

The all stood there looking dubious, when someone broke the silence.

-"Of course. You are a hero after all"

The others followed suit and said the same thing. Everyone praised the hero Chikage.

Up until recently, she lived as the lowest of the low. Bullied, mocked and hurt. The fact that she was useless drilled both into her body and mind.

How about now though?

Those who hurt her once were now trying to get on her good side.

The adults who thought of her as nothing more than a stone by the side of the road, were now holding her hands.

-(All because...I'm a hero now...)

Chikage ended up staying the night at home that day.

She hated spending time with her parents, but right now their existence meant very little to her.

She hated how weak and worthless they were.

The heroes' families received all sorts of compensation from Taisha; Chikage recalled hearing about that once. She thought the fact that her parents could even still live and afford her mother's bills was all thanks to her.

The hero Chikage was allowing them to live.

Looking at her mother, her eyes blank due to medication; she asked.

-"Hey...Mom"

-"What...?"

-"Are you happy...I became a hero?"

-"Yes...I am glad I gave birth to you...I love you"

Celebrated at birth.

Cursed and scorned later.

Chikage was being celebrated once more.

The next day, Chikage went back to Kagawa.

Shortly after, the Vertex' second attack happened.

The enemy of mankind, approaching as they crossed the wall.

The girls holding their weapons stood to face them.

The number of stardust was a lot more than the first time.

But Chikage was no longer afraid.

She cut through them with her scythe.

Wakaba, Tamako, Anzu and Yuuna all were there.

-"Wait...Takashima-san?"

Chikage doubted her eyes for a moment. Yuuna was hospitalized and was supposed to sit through this fight.

After taking care of the enemies before her, she rushed to Yuuna's side.

-"Takashima-san...Weren't you in the hospital...?"

-"Ahahaha....Time stopped so I sneaked out. I can't just sit and watch as you all fight!"

Chikage's mouth loosened at the response.

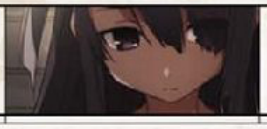
-"Ooh! Gun-chan's smiling! You're not feeling nervous today!"

-"Yes...It won't be like last time..."

-"Alright! Let's defeat all the Vertex and protect Shikoku!"

Chikage nodded as she looked at the swarm.

-(...I'll kill the most...And become number one...)



She jumped into the midst of the Vertex and started cutting them down. Every time she swung her scythe they would split in half letting out an eerie cry and disappear. It was as easy as defeating monsters in a video game.

-(My worth...Is in being a hero...)

Because she was a hero protecting the people and killing the Vertex, that she was praised and loved.

So if she kills the highest number of Vertex and becomes the number one Hero she'll be loved even more.

-(The harder I try the more they'll like me...)

She no longer wanted to be worthless.

For that she'll do anything.

Suddenly, a group of Vertex started gathering and evolving.

-"I'll.. take care of that one...!"

Chikage focused her mind and accessed Shinju's records, menifesting its power in her body.

The new Evolved Vertex, was a giant with a mouth similar to the smaller forms.

-"It simply grew bigger...?"

-"I wonder..."

Tamako and Anzu pondered. and observed its movements.

In an instant, the giant opened it mouth and let out an endless barrage of arrows that rained down on them like a meteor shower.

-"Uwaaaaaaaaa!"

Tamako rushed to turn her weapon into shield form, protecting herself and Anzu from the arrows.

When the monster realized its attacks had no effect on them, it switched to target Yuuna.

-"Waawawawa!"

Yuuna moved about dodging the arrows.

-"I can't get close to it like this"

The monster's firepower was on a whole different level compared to Anzu's crossbow. Trying to approach it recklessly won't end well.

It then set its sights on Chikage.

The endless stream of arrows shot towards her and evicerated her.

She collapsed and fell down to the Jukai.

-"Gun-chaaaaaaaaaaan!!"

Yuuna's scream resounded.

But then she saw something unbelievable.

Chikage who should have vanished in the Jukai, was rushing towards the Vertex from another spot.

Looking closely, there wasn't a single Chikage, but 7 of her nearing down on the enemy.

-"A cloning technique?! Gun-chan you're a ninja?!"

-(That's not it...Takashima-san...)

The fairy whose power she manifested was Shichinin Misaki. It allowed her to exist in seven different places at once. She wouldn't die unless all seven were killed at once.



If one or two were taken down, they would immediately get replaced. The number of people present will always be Seven.

No matter how many arrows there were, it was imposible for them to kill seven people at once. Right now Chikage was immortal.

A dozen bodies got shot down in the process, but the Chikages paid no attention and made their way into melee range.

-(My weapon has the power of...Oohagari)

Once, a farming god went on a rampage after his friend's death and even destroyed the funeral hut in his rage.

The weapon he used was Oohagari. A cursed blade that defiles even the dead.

-(Truly a perfect weapon to be cut down with... don't you think...?)

The seven bodies swung down the human sized scythe at once, attacking seven different spots, causing the giant Vertex to scatter and disappear.

Afterwards, having taken care of the remaining 100 or so enemies, the second battle ended.

Once again, Nogi Wakaba had the highest kill count.

A few days later

It was the midst if autumn, the wind was getting colder.

Chikage was training alone, swinging her giant scythe.

As expected, Taisha praised Wakaba for her exploits in the previous fight, and the medias promoted her even more.

-(I'll become stronger...Much stronger than Nogi-san...)

-"Gun-chaaaan!"

Chikage stopped her hand and looked in the direction of the voice. Yuuna was approaching from the entrance of the training grounds.

-"Takashima-san...What about the hospital?"

-"I finally got discharged today. I was bored all this time! Also, they found out about me sneaking out for the fight the other day...If it weren't for that I would have be able to leave much earlier..."

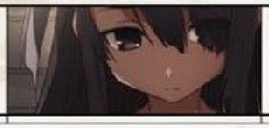
Yuuna shrugged and let out a sigh.

-"What about you Gun-chan? training by yourself?"

-"Yes...I want to be stronger"

Chikage never trained by herself before, but now she had a clear objective.

-(The harder I try...The more everyone will love me...)



If her sole value was in being a hero, then she ought to work and increase that value. For that, she needed to be stronger.

Chikage resumed swinging her weapon.

Thinking purely in weapon specs, Chikage knew her scythe wouldn't lose to Wakaba's Katana. So what was the difference between the two of them? It was probably in the way they handled those weapons.

Wakaba practiced Iai ever since she was a child, she handled the blade like an extension of her body.

On the other hand, Chikage wasn't that good at using the large and heavy scythe.

So she thought, if she trained in handling her weapon even a little bit more she'll definitely catch up to Wakaba.

-"Gun-chan, may I?"

Yuuna extended her hand towards Chikage.

-"....!"

Chikage reacted instinctively. An after effect from back when she used to get bullied. When someone tried touching her her body tensed up in fear.

-(Takashima-san...She must be offended...)

But Yuuna showed no hints of minding it, and touched Chikage's hand.

-"You hold your weapon like this, then swing it like this...WOOSH!!"

With her hand on top of Chikage's, Yuuna made a swinging motion.

-"W-woosh...?"

-"Yup, WOOSH!!"

-"What exactly is Woosh like...?"

-"Like...WHAM!!"

-"Wasn't it Woosh...?"

-"WHAM and WOOSH are the same, but different! It's all about the mindset!"

Yuuna's explanation made no sense, but she tried her best trying to convey it to Chikage.

Chikage appreciated that.

-"Also, Gun-chan"

-"What...?"

-"I think you were true MVP for that last battle, Gun-chan"

-"Eh...?"

Yuuna knew exactly how hard Chikage was fighting. She was watching all along.

With her hand still on Chikage's, Yuuna said smiling as she swung the scythe.

-"Ehehe, Gun-chan's hand is so warm. It's chilly today so I wanna stay like"

-"...Yeah..."

Chikage's eyes started tearing up.

These tears were different from the ones back in her hometown.

-"Huh? You're crying? Did I say something wrong? I'm so sorry!"

Rushing to stop the apologizing Yuuna, Chikage wiped her tears and shook her head.

-"No...This is...not that..."

-"?"

Chikage made a smile, tears still in her eyes and said to the confused Yuuna.

-"Thank you...Takashima-san"

She will no longer be hurt by the wounds from her past. She thought to herself.

Chapter 4 - End.



DENGEKI G's

VOLUME FIVE!!
05

NOVEL



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

SILENT WORLD

著：ごお
イラスト：空中幼彩

アウトロー！ワンダーランドー0ー

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・扉絵：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

CONTENTS

003

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

023

アウトロー・ワンダーランド-0-

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・扉絵：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

041

SILENTWORLD

著：ごぉ
イラスト：空中幼彩

DENGEKI G's NOVEL

電撃G's magazine 2016年1月号付録
[DENGEKI G's NOVEL]



Tama likes Anzu.

Anzu likes Tama back.

Why don't we go out?

That was just a joke...

So why don't those guys get that [redacted]?

Even when the silhouette was [redacted]-ish?.

Judging by how unyielding they were

and how they were unwilling to accept [redacted],

There's only one answer... that Tama can think of.

It's not like they've been [redacted] or whatever all along!

That's impossible!

Mark my words!

If I'm wrong, then just erase this entire diary!

Hero Record Nov 2018 AD

Doi Tamako's Record

第五話 双葉



vol.5

Planning and configuration by Takahiro Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun Vertex Design by D.K&JW WORKS
Supervision by Project 2H

企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい　イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JW WORKS
監修／Project 2H

©2014 Project 2H

乃木若葉は勇者である



Chapter 5: Twin Leaf

Between classes.

Tamako was listening to some music on her smartphone with Anzu as they shared one ear each of a pair of headphones.

-"... So whatcha think about this song?"

Tamako asked Anzu for her opinion without taking off the headphones.

-"It's a nice song, but I think I prefer softer love songs. Like this."

Anzu took out her own smartphone and plugged the headphones into it to play another song.

-"... Mmm~... Not bad. Not bad... but I want something a little more powerful and upbeat... You really gotta go for punk rock when it comes to music!"

-"That's not true. Ballads and love songs are the best, I'd say."

-"No, no, it's the cries of youth! The culmination of passion! Punk rock!"

-"A permeating melody! Heart-shaking romance! Love songs!"

As the two quarreled, the bell chimed. The teacher came into the room at the same time.

-"Oh, time for class?"

Anzu and Tamako hastily put away the headphones and their smartphones and headed to their seats. But before they got to their respective places, Tamako softly whispered into Anzu's ear.

-"Tell me the name of that song you liked later, Anzu. Maybe I'll understand what's so good about it if I listen to it some more."

-"Yeah. Then give me some more of your recommended songs, Tamacchi-senpai. I'll try listening to them."

-"Tama-chan and An-chan really get along, huh?"

Yuuna spoke merrily as she ate udon in the cafeteria.

Everyone was eating lunch together again today.

-"Well, me and Anzu are like sisters after all!"

Tamako hugged Anzu as she spoke.

That said, since Tamako was smaller than Anzu, it looked more like she was clinging onto her rather than hugging her.

-"Eheheh."

Anzu didn't seem bothered by it at all.

-"Actually, me and Anzu could even live together."

Anzu responded teasingly.

-"Well... but it'd be tough if I moved in with Tamacchi-senpai. She's got a bicycle and lots of camp gear and other stuff lying around that I really don't quite understand, so she'd have to put all that stuff away first."

-"Th-that's no ordinary bicycle. It's a road bike. I leave it in my room so it doesn't rust or anything. And I'm sure I'll be using that camp gear soon enough, okay! ...It's just that I haven't had much opportunity to do so after becoming a hero."

Tamako loved the outdoors, so on her days off, she'd go mountain climbing or long-distance cycling trips. She would really like to go camping in the mountains, but the Taisha was not very receptive to the idea of letting her spend the night in distant areas.

-"It's not like your room's perfect either, you know, Anzu? There's books everywhere: your bookshelves, your desk, your bed's headboard... Nothing but books! And not just any books, but romance novel after romance novel after romance novel after romance novel after romance novel...! And they just keep multiplying each time I come into your room."

-"I like it that way! It makes me happy to be surrounded by books."

Anzu spoke with an elated expression on her face.

Her love of reading was second to none. The walls of her room belonged to her bookshelves filled to capacity with romance novels and novels for girls. And there seemed to be no end to the daily growth rate of the room's book population.

-"Tama just can't get how you do it..."

Tamako muttered in exasperation.

-"You two... sure know a lot about each other's rooms, don't you...?"

Chikage looked up from her portable game device to say that, having quickly finished her lunch to play games.

She didn't pause the game either; her fingers nimbly worked the buttons even with her eyes off the screen.

Tamako nodded matter-of-factly at Chikage's words.

-"That's 'cause Tama's room's right next to Anzu's! We frequent visit each other!"

The heroes' school was an all-boarding school. The school building, that is, Marugame Castle, had a dormitory on its premises where the five heroes and the miko, Hinata, lived.

-"In that case, Wakaba-chan always comes to my room too."

Hinata spoke somewhat boastfully with her chin up.

-"Whenever Wakaba-chan comes to my room, she's either asking for advice with a troubled look on her face, or she's begging me to let her rest her head on my lap and clean her ears."

-"H-Hinata!"

Wakaba tried desperately to cover Hinata's mouith, but it was too late.

-"That isn't what Wakaba-san is usually like..."



Anzu shot Wakaba a surprised look.

Yuuna blinked in stupefaction for a moment.

-"Wait, so you mean Wakaba-chan's like a dependent little puppy?"

-"Only around me, that is."

Hinata spoke with a chuckle.

-"Now that you mention it, Wakaba-san seems to naturally tend to sit next to Hinata-san. She's even sitting next to her now."

Wakaba's face became even redder at Anzu's words.

-"B-but what about you, Hinata? You've been coming to my room every evening even when you don't have any business with me, haven't you? I bet it's because you feel lonely, isn't it!?"

-"No. In my case, I come to make sure you're prepared for the next day, Wakaba-chan. You've always got your homework and reviews done perfectly, but you carelessly forget to put your textbooks back into your bag sometimes. Naturally, I covertly put your textbooks and notebooks back into your bag when that happens, though."

-"Huh... You have!?"

Apparently Wakaba hadn't realized that.

-"Hina-chan, you're kinda like Wakaba-chan's mom."

-"Of course. I raised Wakaba-chan myself, after all."

Hinata replied with a smile at Yuuna's words of praise.

-"L-let's just drop the topic here! Drop it!"

Wakaba-chan desperately tried to end the conversation, her face still red.

On the way back to class from the cafeteria, Hinata asked Anzu a question.

-"Anzu-san, how do you think you and Tamako-san get along so well?"

Hinata was a miko, and thus received personal data on the heroes from the Taisha. Anzu and Tamako's birthplaces were nearby, but they had first met when the Vertexes appeared. They hadn't been close friends from the start like Wakaba and Hinata.

And yet Anzu and Tamako already got along like longtime friends by the time they had all gathered at the school at Marugame Castle.

-"Well..."

Anzu looked at Tamako from a few steps behind as she recalled the past.

-"I've gotten better, but in the past, I had a very weak constitution. I've been hospitalized quite a few times too..."

--The third year of elementary school.

Anzu's constitution was particularly fragile that year, so she rarely ever went to school.

She ended up not meeting the required number of attendance days and had to repeat a year.

Her entire class and all her friends in the same grade moved on to the next year and she was left behind.

In the classroom full of students a year younger than her-- Anzu was an outsider.

But it wasn't as if she were bullied. The teachers and students took careful consideration to not treat her any differently than any other student.

But that consideration itself lead to discomfort. It placed just a little distance between Anzu an the others. A distance that perhaps the other students didn't feel, but only Anzu did.

Anzu always felt as if there were a thin wall between her and her classmates. Before she knew it, the distance between them grew, and she found herself spending more and more time reading books alone.

Being in the wrong grade made her feel uncomfortable, alone, alienated. Would the feeling never leave no matter how many grades she went up? Would it follow her out of elementary school and into middle school, even high school--

(Will I have to live my entire life never making friend with those around me...?)

Whenever that thought crossed her mind, even when reading her favorite book, she would cry.

The seemingly endless loneliness turned into bitterness, slowly tightening its grip around Anzu's heart.

Before she knew it, Anzu began yearning for something to save her. Like a prince from the girls' novels she had read--

Eventually, Anzu moved up to the fourth year of elementary school.

And on the last day of July, the Vertexes invaded.

Anzu's birthplace was northwest Ehime Prefecture in a town flanked by the ocean and the mountains.

For days, calamities like earthquakes and abnormal gusts of wind had occurred, sending local residents on alert, but on that night, they were told to evacuate inland due to a tsunami.

The Vertexes arrived when Anzu was moving to a shelter with her parents. Abnormal monsters descended from the sky. In the ensuing chaos of people running for their lives, Anzu got separated from her parents. Before she knew it, she found herself in front of a small shrine.

There, she awoke to her powers as a hero.

As if something were guiding her, she found an oyumi [Japanese crossbow/ballista said to shoot rapidfire. It's a different word used compared to Anzu's crossbow in 2018] that had been dedicated there. She came to an understanding beyond all conventional logic that it would give her the strength to defeat the monsters before her.

And yet, she could not fight.



Even if she had the power, her feet shook before the presence of the Vertexes. The young Anzu had no experience in battle whatsoever. There was no way she could be expected to face off against such gargantuan monstrosities with a single oyumi.

(Help me...)

As she shook in fear of the approaching monsters, Anzu prayed.

(Someone help me, please--)

-"Over here, huhhhh!?"

Suddenly, the Vertex in front of Anzu's eyes was smashed by what appeared to be a circular sheet of metal-- a shield perhaps?-- that had been thrown. The shield pierced into the Vertex's gigantic white body and the monster let out a bizarre cry as it vanished.

The one who threw the shield was a girl-- a girl smaller than Anzu, but brimming with energy.

Anzu intuitively understood that the shield that had dealt a fatal blow to the monster was a weapon imbued with a special power just like Anzu's oyumi.

The small girl ran like the wind to retrieve the shield that had felled the Vertex. She then immediately attacked another one nearby.

As she stood in the midst the horde of white monsters, she used her shield as an overbearing weapon, butchering enemy after enemy.

Anzu could only watch her in amazement.

Soon enough, all the surrounding Vertexes were swept away--

Anzu had fallen onto her rear, so the shield girl approached her and lent her a hand.

That hand was covered in wounds, likely due to the preceding battle.

-"Are you okay? Tama's on the scene, so you don't gotta worry about a thing."

That was Anzu's meeting with Doi Tamako.

The moment she first made contact with what would be her saving pillar of support.

-"Apparently Tamacchi-senpai awoke to her hero powers at another shrine nearby and was told by a miko to come save me--"

-"Uugh... That's such a nice story..."

Hinata's eyes had teared up as she listened to Anzu's story.

-"Huh, h-hey, Hinata-san!? It wasn't really a story sad enough to cry over, was it!?"

-"No, it definitely was. So much that I want to publish it online or in a book to tug at the heartstrings of the masses."

Hinata wiped her tears as she spoke.

-"Ahahah..."

Hinata-san is kind of an odd person-- Anzu thought.

-"Teehee... So in other words, Tamako-san is your knight in shining armor, then, huh?"

-"Yes. She has the strength and dignity that I don't... She's given me a bond that's blind to things like grade or classroom status."

When Anzu talks about Tamako, she sounds as if she's proud for her.

Hinata smiled at seeing Anzu like that before deciding to tease Tamako, who was walking ahead of them.

-"--Sooo, Anzu-san thinks of Tamako in that way, but how does Tamako-san feel?"

-"!"

Tamako's face became pure red as she stopped in her tracks.

Anzu and Hinata had been talking right behind Tamako, so there was no way she hadn't heard their conversation.

-"Aggh!! It was embarrassing, so I was pretending not to hear it! The hell's with the backhanded compliments right behind my back, eh!? Calling me a prince!? You trying to torture me!?"

As Tamako started to explode, Wakaba and Yuuna worked together to pin her arms behind her back.

-"Calm down!"

-"Yeah, calm down, Tama-chan."

-"Mghghgh..."

Tamako got quiet after the two of them held her down.

-"So, uh, how -do- you feel, then?"

Yuuna asked with deep curiosity.

-"Yuuna!! Why you--!!"

That said, Tamako wasn't actually mad. Just trying to hide her embarrassment.

She shook off Yuuna and Wakaba and hugged Anzu.

-"Just look at how cu~te Anzu is! Tama just -has- to protect her!"

Outside of their fight with the Vertexes, the heroes had peaceful days.

But--

When the time to fight begins, they must become humanity's shield. Humanity's sword.

The Vertexes next invaded Shikoku that very afternoon.



Atop the giant vegetation coating Marugame Castle's walls stood the heroes equipped with their weapons.

The Vertex horde approaching from beyond the wall looked so small from that distance.

Wakaba checked her smartphone map to confirm the invader's numbers. The enemy seemed to be 100 strong this time.

-"...Hmm?"

Among the Vertex markers displayed on the map, one was noticeably different. Its speed was overwhelmingly faster than the others. It slipped out from the horde and headed towards Wakaba and the others.

-"What's with this guy?"

Wakaba looked towards the vertex horde.

She saw "something" rushing at an incredible speed through the vegetation-covered land of Shikoku. It looked like a fragment of a human from the abdomen down. Sprinting bipedally on slender legs.

Its speed far outstripped the other Vertexes. It nimbly darted its way through the gigantic vegetative structures that crept across the land and what little uncovered buildings remained along its path.

-"A... a pervert!?"

Yuuna drew her face back at the sight of the mysterious Vertex's eldritch movements.

-"An evolved one, huh?"

Wakaba furrowed her brow and stared at the bipedal movements.

Unlike before, this Vertex seemed to have invaded in an evolved form from the start.

-"... I can't eat that."

-"No, please don't even think about it!"

Anzu quickly threw in a retort to Wakaba's muttering.

Then Tamako gave an insinuating smile.

-"Heheheh..."

-"What's up, Tama-chan?"

Tamako triumphantly answered the confused Yuuna.

-"This time I've brought a secret weapon. --Tama's special udon tama!!"

As she spoke, Tamako held up a ball of udon with 'Special Grade! Freshly Made!' written on the packaging.

-"How... are you going to use that...?"

To answer Chikage's doubts, Tamako pointed dramatically at the bipedal Vertex as she spoke.

-"The Taisha people say that Vertexes have intelligence, right? And look at that... that almost half a human shape... That thing might be almost human!"

-"I see! So then maybe we can use the udon as a diversion if it reacts to it!"

-"Exactly, Yuuna! No human can remain calm in the presence of this top-grade Sanuki udon! Teyaahhhh! Eat this! Literally~~~!!"

Tamako made a big windup and hurled the packaged udon at the incoming evolved Vertex.

The ball of udon flew as aimed and landed in front of the evolved Vertex's path.

However--

The bipedal Vertex paid no heed to the ball of udon and kept going straight on its path without slowing down.

-----"!!!!?"

All of the heroes shuddered.

-"The udon... got no reaction from it...!?"

Wakaba's hands shook in shock and rage.

-"Was it because it wasn't served kamaage!?"

-"No, Tama-chan... even if it wasn't served kamaage... how could it completely ignore top-grade udon like that...!!?"

Yuuna hung her head in sorrow as she wrung out the words from her lungs.

Tamako, Anzu, and Chikage all thought the same way as well.

It was then that the girls were firmly convinced:

Vertexes had not a shred of humanity in them. There could be no mutual human-Vertex understanding for perhaps all eternity.

-"... I promise I'll come back for you."

Tamako muttered as she looked towards the thrown ball of udon. Since it was still in its packaging, the contents still seemed to be okay.



In their hands, the heroes held their weapons. In their hearts, they held rage and sadness.

-"Revenge for the top-grade udon! That bastard's Tama's!"


うどん
最高級おちたて



First, Tamako lunged straight for the bipedal Vertex.

-"Teyaaaaahh!"

Tamako hurled her bladed yo-yo. But the bipedal Vertex dodged it with ease.

-"Khh!"

She hurled the bladed yo-yo a second and a third time, but the Vertex dodged each time.

-"I can't hit it! This thing's too damn fast!"

This Vertex's properties were almost all completely different from anything they had fought before.

Vertexes had giant, sturdy bodies, but their movements were slow, making them simple to attack. But this bipedal Vertex just couldn't be hit at all.

-"Tamacchi-senpai! I'll back you up!"

Anzu shot a volley of arrows from the side. As to be expected, the bipedal Vertex easily dodged those arrows as well before setting its sights on Anzu and approaching her.

-"...!"

Anzu's crossbow has the advantage of long-range capability, but it is not suited for close-range battle. She frantically fired arrow after arrow, but nothing hit.

The bipedal Vertex began to attack Anzu with something akin to a dropkick--

-"Don't you dare touch Anzu!!"

Tamako got inside the gap between Anzu and the bipedal Vertex and expanded her bladed yo-yo into a shield form. The shield was able to block the dropkick, but was unable to tank the momentum. Tamako and Anzu were blown away with the shield.

-"Uwah!?"

-"Kyah!"

The two of them struck the ground. Tamako put herself on the bottom to protect Anzu from the impact damage.

-"Tamacchi-senpai!?"

-"Ugh... owww....!!"

Tamako grimaced as she applied pressure to her left shoulder with her right hand.

-"My shoulder...!"

Anzu looked at Tamako's shoulder. There was a visible protrusion near her left collarbone.

A dislocation, or perhaps a fracture.

The hero's outfit increases defense, but it does not completely negate damage.

-"Why..."

Anzu felt wretched about herself. If Tamako hadn't covered for her, she wouldn't have gotten injured like this.

Tamako was far superior to Anzu in terms of power as a hero. It would've been better if Anzu had been the one to get hurt and Tamako had been okay.

But even as her face warped in pain, Tamako made sure to smile as she talked to Anzu.

-"It's okay... Tama's the one who decided to protect you. It's not your fault."

To protect Anzu-- That was what Tamako swore to do the day the two of them first met.

For as long as she could remember, people told Tamako she was a rowdy kid.

She was confident, and had superb reflexes and never lost any fights with boys.

She would get into fights every day and come back home after playing dangerous games outside, causing a constant source of worry for her parents.

-"Why can't she be more feminine...?"

Her mother always looked troubled.

Tamako didn't understand what exactly they meant by 'feminine'.

But if she were 'feminine' then her parents probably wouldn't look so troubled anymore.

(But... I can't help it.)

Tamako is Tamako.

Confident, rowdy, quick tempered. She couldn't change her nature.

And thus--

When she awoke to her powers as a hero, she thought it was perfect for her. She didn't fear her enemies. She fought without wavering. It fit her perfectly to be assigned the role of fighting.

If she just kept beating down the monsters, she could make everyone happy even without becoming more feminine. Her mother wouldn't have to look so troubled.

So when she followed the miko's words and went to go save Iyojima Anzu, Tamako was a little surprised with how different she was from her.

Anzu had fallen on her rear in fear of the Vertexes, without any hint of a will to fight.

(What? And she's supposed to be a hero...?)

Though she had that thought, she still saved her for the time being. Tamako used her shield, her individual weapon, to defeat the Vertexes.

She then lent her hand to Anzu to help her up. Though Anzu was taller, she was also paler and more fragile, like a glass sculpture.



(Can such a delicate thing fight...?)

As Tamako pondered that question, Anzu took a look at Tamako's hand and muttered.

-"Your injuries..."

When Anzu said that, Tamako noticed the injuries on her own hand. Apparently she got wounded during the battle.

-"Ahh, this is nothing! Just a scratch! Just a scratch!"

Though Tamako tried to laugh it off, Anzu shook her head to the side.

-"No. Even scratches can get infected and cause illnesses..."

Anzu took a bottle of mineral water out of the bag she had taken for the evacuation and soaked it into a handkerchief to wash the wounds on Tamako's hand.

-"Let's disinfect it properly later."

And with that, Anzu wrapped her hands around Tamako's wounded hand.

-"Thank you... for saving me..."

Tamako looked at Anzu.

A frail, fearful girl completely unfit for combat.

But a girl with a gentle, compassionate heart.

(Ah, guess it's no use.)

Tamako smiled wryly.

You could probably call girls like that "feminine".

But she was a different being entirely from Tamako. No matter how hard she tried, Tamako could probably never be like Anzu.

So in that case--

(In that case, Tama will protect her, no matter what.)

She thought that if she couldn't become that ideal herself, then the least she could do would be to protect a girl who was that ideal.

While that decision may have been nothing more than settling for an alternative, it was a decision Tamako still swore upon.

And now--

Tamako somehow managed to bear the pain in her shoulder and stand up.

Good thing the injury was on her left. As long as her right shoulder's fine, she could still fight. She could still protect Anzu.

Tamako stood in front of Anzu and gripped her bladed yo-yo.

-"Please, don't push yourself..."

Anzu tearfully pleaded.

But Tamako didn't want to make Anzu cry like that.

-"I'm fine, okay? There's no way the amazing Tama can lose to a pair of pervy legs like that..."

Tamako stifled the pain as she spoke and searched for the bipedal Vertex.

Wakaba was standing up against the bipedal Vertex alone.

The reason the enemy hadn't immediately gone in for another attack on Tamako and Anzu was because Wakaba had kept it at bay.

Wakaba shouted at Tamako and Anzu as she swung her sword.

-"If you're injured, stay down!"

-"This is nothing! I can still fight!"

Tamako yelled back.

Wakaba nodded wordlessly at her reply.

Wakaba swung her sword against the bipedal Vertex. The sword flashed out of its sheath with tremendous speed, but could only deal a glancing blow against the bipedal Vertex. It was nimbly dodging so that it barely avoided ever getting dealt the decisive blow.

On the other hand, Wakaba kept dodging the bipedal Vertex's attacks without getting hit once, thanks to her reflexes and posture.

As the stalemate began to get stale, the enemy suddenly started running in a different direction.

-"What?"

Taken aback, Wakaba froze.

The first one to quickly notice the bipedal Vertex's intention was Anzu.

She had taken out her smartphone and had brought up the map.

Among the dots marking the Vertexes, just a single one was moving with tremendous speed compared to the others. It was heading towards--

-"That evolved Vertex is heading for the Shinju-sama!"

The Shinju was currently the foundation that supported Shikoku. If something were to happen to the Shinju, it could very well mean the collapse of the ark that is Shikoku.

Alarmed, Wakaba began to chase after the bipedal Vertex, but bladed weapons are at a disadvantage when attacking a fast enemy on the run.



Projectiles are more suitable in this case.

-"Looks like it's Tama's turn then. Wait right here, Anzu."

-"Huh...?"

-"I'll take that bastard down right away!"

Tamako left Anzu with that and began to chase after the bipedal Vertex.

Each step Tamako took caused intense pain to run through her left shoulder, but thanks to the protection of her hero outfit, it didn't hurt enough to prevent her from running.

-"Wakaba! Just leave that bastard to Tama!"

Tamako shouted to Wakaba as she considered her timing to throw her bladed yo-yo at the bipedal Vertex. If she just blindly attacked, it would probably just dodge it again.

-"Tamacchi-senpai! Throw your bladed yo-yo as hard as you can!"

Just then, Anzu's voice echoed from behind.

Tamako looked behind to see Anzu following behind.

I thought I told you to wait!-- Before Tamako could say that, Anzu shouted.

-"It's okay...! Your weapon will hit it, Tamacchi-senpai!"

Anzu spoke with a tone somehow full of conviction.

-"... Roger!"

Before even thinking about it, Tamako placed her belief in Anzu and hurled her bladed yo-yo with all her might.

At the same time, Anzu shot her crossbow.

The bladed yo-yo and the golden arrow chased after the bipedal Vertex-- but the enemy easily dodged them both.

However, Anzu wasn't aiming for the bipedal Vertex.

With machine-like precision, Anzu's arrow shot through the wire attached to Tamako's bladed yo-yo. The deformed wire changed the bladed yo-yo's trajectory, causing it to forcefully hurl at the bipedal Vertex once more.

-"Tamacchi-senpai, transform your bladed yo-yo into its shield form!"

-"--Got it!"

Changing the trajectory and then changing the bladed yo-yo into shield form increased its attack area. Unable to dodge the attack, the bipedal Vertex took a direct hit.

It wasn't a fatal blow, but the bipedal Vertex took enough damage to stop it in its tracks.

-"Anzu, we did it!"

-"Yeah... I won't let myself just be protected forever...!"

Tamako couldn't help but smile at Anzu's words.

-"Alright, let's finish it off in one go!"

-"Yeah!"

Anzu shot volleys of arrows at the slowed bipedal Vertex as Tamako retrieved her bladed yo-yo and hurled it again--

Anzu and Tamako's chain of attacks caused the evolved Vertex to let out a bizarre cry as it vanished.

While the two of them defeated the evolved Vertex, Wakaba, Yuuna, and Chikage eliminated all the other Vertexes, ending the battle in a victory for the heroes.

The only major injury on the hero side was Doi Tamako's dislocated left shoulder. No other injuries besides light scratches were sustained.



The next day, Tamako's left arm was placed in a sling. Since there wasn't a fracture, it wouldn't take that long to heal, but for the time being, she couldn't use her left arm.

During lunch break at the cafeteria, Tamako complained about not bing able to move her left arm.

-"My arm's wrapped too tight like a damn Tama-le... I want to take this thing off already!"

-"No! You'll prolong your injury!"

Anzu scolded Tamako as she fed her udon.

Incidentally, the udon Tamako's eating was the top-grade Sanuki udon she threw during yesterday's battle. After the battle, the ball of udon was retrieved safely and made served as kamaage.

-"Since the Vertexes showed no interest at all for such delicious udon, I guess the rumors about Vertexes having intelligence were wrong... By the way, Anzu, I can move my right arm, so you don't have to go outta your way to feed me."

-"It's hard to eat with just one hand, isn't it?"

-"Not really, but..."

Tamako sighed and let Anzu feed her the udon.

The others smiled as they watched the two of them.

Chapter 5 - End.

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME SIXII

06

VEZ



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱田あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

SILENT WORLD

著：ごお　イラスト：空中幼彩

アウトロー・ワンダーランド-0-

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・原画：saitom
漫画：大岩ケンジ

CONTENTS

003

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

023

SILENTWORLD

著：ごぉ
イラスト：空中幼彩

049

アウトロー・ワンダーランド-0-（ゼロ）

著：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・扉絵：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

DENGEKI G's NOVEL

電撃G's magazine 2016年2月号付録
［ DENGEKI G's NOVEL ］



I'm happy that we got a vacation.

There are lots of books I wanted to read.

Still

The fact that from now on, there was a possibility for a special [redacted] to be [redacted].

It makes me a bit sad.

Hero Record Jan 2019 AD

Iyojima Anzu's Record

第六話
―禍根

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JW WORKS
監修／Project 2H

©2014 Project 2H



vol.6

Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JW WORKS
Supervision by Project 2H



Chapter 6: Root of evil

-"Mmm~...I can feel it in my bones"

Under the night sky, Wakaba let out a deep sigh as she took a dip in the open-air bath.

Next to her, Hinata let out a bitter smile.

-"Wakaba-chan, you sound like an old man"

-"Mmm...This must be the magic of Onsen... Ohh the sound of Seto's waves~ Envelop this mine body~ Embrace the blade in my heart~"

Wakaba's singing voice echoed through the air. Hinata watched over her childhood friend enjoying the bath with a gentle smile.

The year has ended, it was now early January.

The girls came to visit the Onsen at Takamatsu city.

The city was the biggest in Kagawa, as well as being the primary onsen destination in Shikoku. The inland area contains several hot-spring villages that have been frequented ever since the Edo period for their therapeutic qualities.

The coastal area also had several natural springs.

Following every battle, the Miko's oracle would predict that there wouldn't be any more attacks for a while. As such, the heroes had a hot spring Inn reserved for them as part of their vacation. Needless to say, Hinata came along as well.

Wakaba was making a slack expression, unlike her usual self when the onse door suddenly opened. Tamako, followed by Yuuna, Anzu and Chikage were standing there.

-"Ah! I knew you went in ahead of us. Tama wanted to go first!"

With Tamako pointing her finger at her, Wakaba replied without getting out of the bath.

-"You said~...You wanted to explore the Inn and went running around, that was your fault Tamako~"

-"Uwa, what a face you're making. Alright, I might have missed going in first but third place is mine!!"

-"Tamacchi-senpai, don't run in here"

Completely ignoring Anzu's warning, Tamako jumped into the bath.

-"Haa~..."

Anzu let out a sigh.

Following tamako; Yuuna, Chikage and Anzu also went in the water.

The whole group was here. While few in numbers, this felt like a field trip.

Tamako approached Hinata, and said while rubbing her hands.

-"Alrighty, time for your mandatory body check. Show it to me all, exactly how much your body has developed since the last measurements back in spring"

-"Ah, um; Tamako-san, what are you...?"

Sensing the imminent danger, Hinata backed away.

Wakaba and Anzu stood in front of Tamako, protecting Hinata.

-"Tamako! I can see your intentions clearly. You're not laying a finger on Hinata!"

-"Tamacchi-senpai, Onsen are not a place for body inspections"

Tamako flinched.

But at that moment, her eyes switched targets to Anzu's body.

-"Anzu...Now that I look at it, you've been growing as well"

-"Eh?"

-"UNFORGIVABLE!"

Tamako jumped at Anzu; touching her all over.

Yuuna looked at the two with a troubled face; and as if she remembered something, she asked the group.

-"By the way everyone, did the doctors find any irregularities after your exams?"

-"Irregularities...?"

Chikage asked dubiously.

-"Yeah, you know how they've been examining us after every battle. I was just wondering if you all were okay. After I had used Ichimokuren I was told it was just piled up fatigue. After that I was fine"

The heroes were having their bodies examined regularily at a medical facility. Since the Vertex attacks began, it happened after every battle. There were still many mysteries when it came to what effects using their powers had on their bodies.

Tamako ceased her assault on Anzu, and declared proudly.

-"Tama is in perfect health. The dislocated shoulder from that time healed so fast they praised me for it"

-"Haa...ha...I...I'm fine as well. I used to get sick a lot in the past, but that hasn't happened in a while now. it must be thanks to Shinju-sama's blessing"

Anzu said while catching her breath, after she's finally been released from Tamako's grapple.



-"No irregularities here either, I've only suffered minor scratches during battle anyways"

-"I can confirm that. I would be the first to find out if something were wrong with Wakaba-chan"

Hinata made her declaration following Wakaba's words.

-"I see, that's good. What about you Gun-chan?"

So far, Yuuna and Chikage have been the only two who used the power to call faeries. And as such, they have been undergoing a lot more exams than the rest.

-"I'm...Fine. They said there were no problems...I have to kill plenty more Vertex...I can't be falling to injury or sickness"

Chikage said with a quiet voice, but her strong will carried through it.

She changed, Wakaba thought to herself.

Back then, Chikage displayed no interest in taking part in their hero activities. "Why should I put myself in danger by fighting?" Was what she would say, discontent.

Just what caused her to change so much?

-(If I remember correctly, it was around the time of second battle)

Wakaba had no idea what might have transpired during that period.

For now, Chikage had a strong sense of duty. She performed very well during both training and real fights.

Perhaps, one recent event might have caused that change.

During new year's day, festivities were held where the heroes would show up in their battle outfits and be display them before the citizens. Bundles of straw and such were set up to look like Vertex, the heroes would then strike them down with their weapons.

People from all over Shikoku gathered to see them.

It appeared to be a simple festival-like event, but it aimed to strengthen the people's faith in the heroes; as the hope of mankind.

Taisha's objective was well achieved.

The heroes who took part were Wakaba, Tamako and Chikage. Yuuna and Anzu sat out as they didn't feel confident they could perform in front of so many people.

Considering Tamako's fearless personality and the fact that she liked to stand out, she of course was up to the task. What Wakaba thought was unusual was Chikage's desire to participate as well.

The old Chikage would have definitely refused; the fact that she didn't was probably due to the change that occured inside her.

Wakaba stood out the most during the performace. As the leader, she stood at the front and was rather well-recognized. But most of all, her Iai style was well suited to this sort of show, and looked the most graceful fighting imaginary enemies.

The performance was aired on TV, and seeing how it focused on Wakaba the most, Tamako complained how it was unfair, but Chikage silently compared her minor appearences to Wakaba's and took notes on the key differences.

-(Chikage might have the strongest sense of duty out of all of us here...)

Wakaba still in the bath thought while staring at Chikage, who then noticed her and gave her a dubious look.

-"What are you staring at...?"

-"...I was just thinking that you were a hero, Chikage..."

Wakaba meant no harm, but her words must have rubbed Chikage the wrong way who frowned as she said.

-"Obviously...Aren't you the same...?"

Being confronted with the question, Wakaba wondered.

She certainly had a strong sense of duty as well.

However.

She got the feeling she wasn't as conforming to her position as well as Chikage.

-"Haa~ That hit the spot"

Back in their room, having just eaten dinner Tamako rolled on the tatami floor.

-"You'll turn into a cow if you sleep right after eating Tamacchi-senpai"

-"That's exactly what I'm going for. I wanna be big and strong as a cow. Like a fighting bull of Uwajima"

-"That's not the kind of cow you'll turn into..."

Tamako paid no attention to Anzu's retort.

-"That was an extravagant meal. I dread finding out how much it cost though"

Yuuna was right, the meal they have been served was like nothing they ever ate. exquisite and High grade ingredients were used without moderation.

Hinata made a pondering face as she wondered.

-"This must be a special treatement for us Heroes. Back in the Marugame castle, all kinds of things were sent addressed to "The venerated heroes". Food as well as high quality crafts and the such..."



-"Yeah, At first I thought they were some sort of advertisement or propaganda gifts...But that wasn't it"

They were most likely gifts sent out of pure gratitude, Wakaba thought. As a matter of fact, most of the gifts were sent by individuals or other bodies who would benefit nothing from advertisement.

-"Speaking of which, the fact that we had this Inn reserved all to ourselves was quite the gift in itself"

Anzu displayed a troubled smile in response to Tamako's words.

-"I get the feeling only the greatest of politicians or the most famous artists get such extraordinary treatement"

-"This is only natural...What we're doing is far more important...Than a politician or an artist"

Chikage said, indifferent.

But Wakaba was still not used to all of this.

Her reason for fighting was to get revenge for all the people who were hurt or killed. Her blade was a means of payback for all the pain mankind suffered at the hands of the Vertex.

Every deed is worthy of retribution. That was the way of life of the Nogi.

She never asked for this, nor even imagined it. She actually felt a little bad about it.

-"Now then, we've taken a bath, eaten dinner but it's still too early to go to bed. Wanna play a game?"

Tamako stood up.

-"A game? I thought this might happen so I brought Shougi"

Hinata took a small shougi board out of her bag, the portable kind that's sold in toy stores.

-"Hina-chan so cool. I on the other hand brought cards."

Yuuna took out a deck of cards.

-"If you're looking for a game...it's right there..."

Chikage pointed towards the TV. Under it was a game console and collection of newly released games.

-"We could also play Mafia. All we'd need are a pen and paper and the smartphone app"

Anzu suggested.

-"We'll play them all. Tama will win at everything"

Tamako couldn't win at everything.

In fact, the one winning the most was Chikage. Chikage was unbeatable.

Be it videogames, Shougi, cards Mafia. No one could stand up to her.

-"Gun-chan, amazing!"

Yuuna's eyes were full of respect for Chikage. The latter looked expressionless, but her mouth was slightly twisted so much she was happy.

On the other hand, Anzu and Tamako who kept losing to her, lost all confidence and were curled up in the corner.

However, that situation would soon change.

Wakaba who didn't play a lot games and was unused to their nature was confused at first, but as she learned the ropes she was able to fight on equal foot with Chikage.

Right now they were playing a game of Spit, It was a duel between Wakaba and Chikage. The other 4 didn't stand a chance; Tamako and Anzu were back in their corner.

The game revolved around the speed at which you play your cards. Chikage who had played countless action and shooting games had great observation and situation assessment skills. On the other hand, Wakaba who practiced martial arts had otherworldly reflexes and concentration.

On a best of three, they were at one win each.

Both were holding their own.

-"I won't lose...Not to you..."

Chikage mumbled.

That was supposed to be nothing more than a manifestation of Chikage's fighting spirit. But Wakaba felt there was a deeper meaning to it.

However, from the battles thus far, Wakaba familiarized herself with Chikage's style.

This win was most likely hers.

The two made their move. Playing cards at speeds the eye could barely follow.

But Wakaba seemed to be sightly faster. She was gonna win.

-"Uhyaaaa~?!"

Wakaba let out a strange voice as she threw her cards in the air.

Hinata had snuck up and playfully bit her ear.

-"W-What are you doing, Hinata?!"

While that was happening, Chikage had finished playing all her cards.

-"Winner, Gun-chan!"



Yuuna raised Chikage's hand, as Hinata said scolding Wakaba.

-"That's no good Wakaba-chan. It's just a game so don't go making such a scary face. Just have fun"

-"S-still...T-that was ticklish...!"

Wakaba still blushing, Straightened up while still watching our for Hinata.

-"Fufufu; I know of all your weaknesses Wakaba-chan"

-"What? Wakaba's weakness you said?"

-"Could it be? Are you ticklish Wakaba-san?"

Tamako and Anzu who were in the corner suddenly stood up with a gleam in their eyes. This was their chance for revenge.

-"Let's go Anzu! A coordinated attack!"

-"Leave it to me!"

They attacked her from both sides, aiming for her armpits and started tickling.

-"Tickle her to death!"

-"Yes! take this and this and this..."

-"....."

Wakaba was cool as a cucumber.

-".....Tickle her to death!"

-".....Yes! take this and this and this..."

-"....."

Wakaba did not even flinch.

--"huh?!"

Surprised that their attempts had absolutely no effect, Tamako and Anzu were in shock.

-"Fu, fu, fu, fu, fu..."

Wakaba looked down on the two. A smile on her face, but her eyes were serious.

Tamako and Anzu's faces stiffened. Right now. At this very moment. They knew they needed to get away from Wakaba or else. But they were too late. They could no longer move.

-"Tamako...Anzu...I hope you're prehyauuu~!"

Wakaba was sitting down, her face red as a tomato. Behind her Hinata had just blown into her ear.

-"Wakaba-chan's weak point is right here. It's her ear"

She gently bit her ear again causing her to let out another "Hyaaa~..." and collapse on the tatami floor like jellyfish.

Tamako and Anzu were dumbfounded looking at the two interact.

Hinata's lips pulled away from Wakaba who was completely unable to move.

-"Now then, If we kept playing the same games Chikage-san and Wakaba-chan would dominate again, and that's no fun. So I propose we play something different"

-"Something different?"

Yuuna tilted her head.

-"Yes. A new game that's been popular among young kids lately. "The Hero game""

The Hero Game.

A white stuffed cotton cloth would represent the Vertex. The players participating would be the Heroes. The players would throw the stuffed Vertex at each other. The recipient can then either dodge, strike it down with their hand or throw it back.

In other words...

-"That's just pillow fighting!"

Tamako said as white pillow flew across the room.

The girl who were currently occupying the largest room in the inn, split into two teams and were pillow fighting. Wakaba, Tamako and Chikage Vs. Yuuna, Anzu and Hinata. Both teams raised a low table behind which they were hiding as they fired at eachother.

-"Even if the core content remained the same, renewing interest in something simply by changing its name tells you a lot abou the world we live in"

-"It might be that...Some higher up somewhere...thought reviving it was a good idea for economic purposes..."

Wakaba and Chikage Calmly analyzed the situation as they threw pillows.

-"I don't like it one bit..."

Tamako expressed her discontent as she fired at the other team as well.

Both Teams gathered pillows from all over the Inn, so it was unlikely they would run out of ammunition any time soon.

-"At this rate the fight would never end. I'll go in and attack directly"



Glaring at the enemy barricade, Wakaba said.

On each side was a flag set up to represent Shinju-sama. Whichever team's gets knocked down is considered the loser.

-"You intend to dive right in the middle of the crossfire by yourself Wakaba?!"

-"They're only pillows. I can break through!"

Having said that, Wakaba jumped from behind the barricade.

-"Wakaba-chan is charging in!"

Hinata nodded at Yuuna's words.

-"That's just like her. The real fight starts here!"

Hinata's team fired relentlessly to protect their ground.

Wakaba dodged some of the pillows thrown at her, and parried others with her hand. Even if she got hit it would simply hurt a bit. It was no problem.

As she drew closer to her objective she dashed ahead and jumped over the table-barricade and above Hinata and the others. She extended her hand towards the flag.

---"Gotcha!!"

Wakaba wondered. For some reason, two other voices overlapped with her own.

When she looked around, she noticed that Tamako and Chikage also had charged into the enemy camp.
-"Why are you two here?!"

-"I'm not letting you take the credit. I'll be the one taking down their flag!"

-"Wrong...I will...!"

Completely forgetting they were on the enemy side, the three started arguing.

That's when Wakaba noticed. Anzu was nowhere to be seen.

-"?! Anzu! Where is Anzu..."

Right as she looked around searching for her.

-"I got the flag~!"

Anzu's voice echoed from the other side.

Surprised, Wakaba turned around only to see Anzu standing in their camp with the flag in her hand. Hinata grinned.

-"Anzu-san snuck past you as you all charged at our camp"

Wakaba, Tamako and Chikage were dumbfounded as Anzu shook the flag in the distance.

-"I used the "Thirty-six stratagems" as a reference, mainly 'sneak through the passage of Chencang' and 'Slough off the cicada's golden shell'"

It looks like Anzu was the one who came up with the strategy.

After the game, everyone went back to their room and fell asleep immediately.

Wakaba, stood by the window with the lights still off as she looked down on the city.

As you would expect from a big city like Takamatsu, even this late at night the lights were still on.

Each of these tiny lights was a beacon of life.

Across the city was the sea, soaked in darkness. The "wall" protecting Shikoku could be seen in the distance.

It's been 3 years and a few months since Shikoku got cut off from the mainland.

What has the world beyond the wall turned to?

What has become of Nagano with whome contact was lost?

What of Shiratori...

-"Wakaba-chan"

When she turned around to where the voice came from, Hinata was standing there.

-"Sorry, did I wake you up?"

-"No, I also couldn't sleep"

Hinata sat on the chair next to the window.

-"Were you watching the sea?"

-"Yeah. Even away from the Marugame castle I can't seem to shake off this habit"

Just like how she couldn't forget about that day three years ago.

Just like how she couldn't forget about the world beyond the wall.

Wakaba stares across the Seto sea at least once a day.

-"...Wakaba-chan"

-"What?"

-"I think it'd be better if you spent more time looking around you. At the people close to you."

-"What's that supposed to mean?"



-"Just today..."

Hinata's words cut off mid sentence. Due to the room being dark, Wakaba couldn't tell what sort of face she was making.

-"...never mind. This is something you yourself ought to notice."

Hinata stood up and went back to her futon.

-"You should go to sleep as well Wakaba-chan. staying up late is bad for you"

Wakaba would soon know the meaning of the words Hinata said that night.

-"...there's too much of them"

Wakaba made a stern face, looking at the map displayed on her smartphone screen.

The attack occurred about half a month after they returned to Marugame castle. The number of Vertex displayed on the screen was unusually high this time around.

-"This is...over 10 times as much as usual, maybe more"

Yuuna mumbled while looking at her phone. A hint of tension could be felt in her voice.

In the past, only a hundred or so Vertex would show up at once; but this time there appeared to be over a thousand.

The heroes were used to fighting by now and would have no problem defeating individual Vertex. But with this much attacking at once, the situation was completely different.

-(No. As a leader I can't be showing a weakness now.)

Wakaba stared at the swarm approaching, and gripped her Katana tightly.

-"I'll go on ahead"

If there are 10 times more enemies, we'll just have to defeat that much- no, even more.

Wakaba leaped toward the swarm.

-"Wait, Wakaba-sa..."

By the moment Anzu spoke up, Wakaba already started moving.

She rushed toward the swarm and destroyed several Vertex as she jumped in the midst of it.

The Vertex seeing Wakaba running in alone, started gathering around her.

That's when the rest of the Heroes noticed their irregular behavior.

-"What's the meaning of this? they're not coming this way?"

It was just like Tamako said. All of the Vertex' attention switched to Wakaba.

The Vertex who attacked humans instinctively, have so far viewed the heroes as equal "threats" when they attacked. That might have been arrogance on their part. The fact that they could still exterminate the humans on a full frontal attack as they're the superior and stronger beings.

But they too possessed intelligence.

As they kept losing, they started adopting battle tactics as well.

Anzu seeing the entire swarm gather around Wakaba yelled.

-"They intend of defeating Wakaba-san first...!"

There were so many enemies that they completely blocked Wakaba's line of sight. She was completely cut off from the other heroes.

Wherever she looked, all she could see was those white abominations. But Wakaba never panicked, nor thought of retreating.

-(This isn't enough to make me waver)

A lot of people were killed by these monsters. Innocent people, young people, people with loved ones, people who earnestly lived their lives. Countless people had their lives taken for no reason.

The scene from that day was etched into Wakaba's mind.

The countless bodies torn apart. The destroyed homeland. The peaceful days lost. The people running away like fugitives. The screams of sadness and anger.

-(I will have them pay for that!!)

The other heroes didn't just stand there. The four of them rushed to help Wakaba, but at that moment the enemy made another move.

Part of the Vertex surrounding Wakaba split off and headed towards the tree.

-"This is bad..."

Chikage expressed her frustration looking at the current situation.

The "part" that split off was as much as all five would usually fight together, due to the huge number that invaded this time around. And the moment the tree falls, it's all over.

The Heroes would feel pressured to prioritize saving the tree over going to Wakaba's aid.

-"Wakaba-chan..."

Wakaba or the tree. Yuuna made a pained expression as she wondered.

However, they didn't really have a choice.

The tree had behind it the lives of everyone in Shikoku.

They headed towards the swarm that rushed for the tree.



-"Wakaba!! Come this way!! Don't fight by yourself, we have to stay together!!"

Tamako yelled while moving away from Wakaba.

Being completely focused as always, It was unclear if that voice reached her.

Wakaba was fighting so many at once, despite her superior abilities and the powers from the Tree; her stamina wasn't endless, and as such was being overwhelmed slowly.

The moment she lost her concentration due to being exhausted, 3 Vertex lunged at her from the left, right and above.

-"Haa!"

She cut two of them in one swing, but the one on the right side managed to slip through. She tried dodging out of the way but it got a hold of her Right arm holding the blade.

-"Gua...aaa!"

The teeth-like organs broke through the skin and chomped on her arm, as they tore through her blood vessels a sharp pain coursed through her brain, almost causing her to faint.

However, this was the pain of all the people murdered by the Vertex.

No, compared to the people torn apart, eaten alive and eventually killed. This much pain was nothing.

-"Just how much pain and suffering did you monsters inflict on innocent people?!!"

Wakaba switched the blade to her left hand and cut the Vertex still holding onto her right in two. In her rage she continuously slashed any that approached her.

She fought like a fierce god. Hatred and rage burning in her eyes. Each time she swung her blade, blood would gush out from her right arm.

However, in face of the overwhelming numbers, it was starting to become clear. Wakaba was so focused on the enemies in front of her, she couldn't sense the giant monster approaching from behind.....

-"Wakaba-chan!"

The one who saved her was Yuuna. She suddenly appeared in the midst of the swarm and started holding them off instead of Wakaba.

-"Uwaa!"

Yuuna was sent flying and crashed on the giant roots, and immediately a large number of Vertex started heading towards her.

-"Yuuna!!"

Wakaba cut down the swarm attacking Yuuna, picked her up and jumped away from the enemy.

-"Thanks...Wakaba-chan"

Yuuna smiled faintly, but her body was already filled with injuries. Her battle outfit torn in different places and her left arm and right leg soaked in her own blood. That wasn't due to the blow from before, no. She had already fought countless enemies before she jumped in to help Wakaba.

-"Why...did you come here?!"

Wakaba's style was to jump in first, take on as much enemies as possible and deal with them. She didn't need support nor someone to fight alongside her, however.

-"...I just couldn't abandon a friend..."

Yuuna said as she got up on her feet.

Wakaba had forgotten. Yuuna was the kind of girl who would never sit and watch someone else suffer. She knew she wouldn't be able to convince her to get away by herself. Now that it came to this, Wakaba took her Katana in hand and faced her back to Yuuna's.

-"...Yuuna, You better survive"

-"You too Wakaba-chan...It's fine...We're all strong after all...!"

Shrugging away the pain and fatigue, Yuuna clenched her fist.

The two charged at the countless Vertex around them.

It was a fight like they've never experienced before. The battle that took place during the frozen time lasted for over six hours.

The heroes eventually managed to take down all the Vertex.

But they all had suffered rather heavy injuries.

Especially Yuuna who was rushed into a Taisha hospital immediately.



After the forestization had reverted, and Yuuna was carried out of the Marugame castle.

Wakaba had just been slapped by Chikage.

-"Nogi-san...Why did you do something to rash...?"

Feeling the heat on her cheek, Wakaba stood there silent.

-"It's because you tried to fight by yourself like that...That Yuuna-san was...!"

Tamako and Anzu said nothing as they watched the two.

Unsure if they should intervene. Somewhere deep inside, they knew Chikage was speaking the truth. If Chikage weren't yelling at Wakaba right now, Tamako would probably have done so instead.

-"Running in by yourself...And putting Yuuna-san in such danger...! You could have at least used to power of a faerie, maybe then it would lessen the burden on Yuuna-san...But you didn't even have the decency to do that...!"

Chikage's words were undeniable. Wakaba couldn't talk back.

-(It was all...Due to my misjudgment and conceit...)

Because she rushed in by herself. Because she went into what could be described as a frenzy, Yuuna ended up in that state.

The fact that she didn't call forth the power of faeries was because that fighting style was unsuited for long battles due to the extreme backlash. But that decision also was so she could defeat at least one more enemy. if she had done it, it would have definitely spared Yuuna a lot of pain.

-"You...You're not even looking at your surroundings...! You need to be more self-aware of your position as a leader...!!"

The question that she once asked herself; If she really were fit to lead the group, once again appeared in her mind.

The cold and heavy winter sky extended atop the heroes' heads.

Chapter 6 - End.

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME SEVEN!!

07

NOVEL



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい　イラスト：BUNBUN　監修：Project 2H

アウトロー・ワンダーランド

原案：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・扉絵：saitom
著：波摘

SILENTWORLD

著：ごぉ
イラスト：空中幼彩

ガーリッシュ ナンバー

著：渡 航
キャラクター原案・扉絵：QP:flapper
挿絵：やむ茶



It's my fault.

I hurt those who fight alongside with me.

While I keep on fighting and winning, did I end up [redacted]?

I have been convinced that I was fine the way I am now…

…Hinata has said.

That in the first place, the reason the world had fallen into this state

Was because of mankind's [redacted].

That's what Shinju-sama has been telling her.

Does that mean I'm also one of them…?

Hero Record Jan 2019 AD

Nogi Wakaba's Record

第七話
―新芽―

vol.7

Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JW WORKS
Supervision by Project 2H



企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JW WORKS
監修／Project 2H

乃木若葉は勇者である

©2014 Project 2H



Chapter 7: New Bud

When she opened her eyes, her vision was covered by a white ceiling.

For a moment, Wakaba didn't know where she was.

After surveying her surroundings, "Ahh, this is the hospital" she recalled.

-"Are you awake, Wakaba-chan?"

Hinata was sitting next to the bed Wakaba was lying on.

After the Vertices' largest ever invasion, the Heroes were hospitalized for treatment and physical examination.

Including Wakaba, everyone was injured because of the fight. In addition, they also need to investigate the impact of using Hero's power for a long period of time.

Although Wakaba had some external wounds on her body, it seemed like none of them was severe enough to linger around for long. However, because of inflammation in joints and muscles in various places, as well as stress fracture in some parts, she was told to refrain from exercising. Even though she didn't have any big wounds on the outside, the same could not be said for the inside of her body.

A body of a middle school student is not as completed as an adult's. Even if it is strengthened by Shinju's power, overworking one's body has never be a good thing.

Wakaba got up from the bed.

-"Do you want to eat something?"

Among the fruits they received as "Gift for the Heroes" from the townspeople, Hinata took out an apple and started peeling its skin with a knife. After cutting the apple into comb-shaped pieces, she used a toothpick to pick one up and presented it to Wakaba.

After being fed two, three pieces of apple, Wakaba got off the bed.

-"I have to go check up on Yuuna"

-"…That's right"

After a short moment of hesitation, Hinata nodded.

As Wakaba tried to walk with her unsteady feet, Hinata propped up her shoulder.

With each step forward, the inside of Wakaba's body screamed with pain.

Having borrowed Hinata's shoulder, Wakaba finally arrived in front of the ICU.

Anzu and Tamako were also there. Tamako was sitting on the couch in the hallway, hanging her head. Next to her, Anzu was glancing around, not knowing what to do.

-"Ah, Wakaba-san"

Noticing Wakaba's arrival, Anzu spoke up.

-"How is Yuuna… doing?"

In answer to Wakaba's sad question, Anzu looked down and shook her head.

-"…Her consciousness still hasn't returned"

-"I see…"

Beyond the glass window, Yuuna was lying on the bed inside the treatment room. It was painful to look at her covered in bandages and tubes.

-"It'll be fine… After all, this hospital has the best equipments and doctors. And according to the examination, her life isn't in danger"

That said, Hinata's voice still sounded somewhat sad.

Right now, even the usually noisy Tamako was unable to say anything.

None of the 4 people remaining in front of the treatment room knew what they should say, they all were at lost for words.

Silence prevailed for who knew how long.

Pushing her IV stand, Chikage showed up.

Keeping her mouth shut, Chikage went past Wakaba's side, and looked at Yuuna beyond the glass window. And then, she bit down on her lip in frustration.

-"Why did… this happen…?"

Like she was lamenting her own powerlessness.

Like she was cursing this world.

Chikage muttered.

And then she turned her gaze at Wakaba. Whether it was because of crying or because of lack of sleep, Chikage's eyes were red.

-"This is… the outcome of your action…"

Wakaba took Chikage's blame in silence. Wakaba was aware that she was the one responsible for Yuuna's injuries.



-“Why did things turn out like this… do you know?”

-“I know. It was all because I stuck out and lacked any kind of plan…”

The independent action that could be said as going berserk. It was what brought about this outcome.

-“Wrong…!”

Chikage squeezed out a cry.

-“As I thought, you don’t understand anything…! The number 1 problem is your reason for fighting…!”

-“My reason, for fighting…?”

Wakaba didn’t understand the meanings of her words.

-“You always only fight to revenge against the Vertices…! That’s why… You lose yourself in rage…! And don’t even realize when you’re the one exposing the people around you to danger!!”

-“…”

Chikage’s words resounded in the hallway.

Even though Tamako could also hear her voice, she kept hanging her head, saying nothing. Not even she could defense Wakaba right now.

-“You… are not qualified to be our leader…! Because of your fighting, Yuuna-san was hurt… From now on too, the same thing will definitely happen again! In that case… I--”

-“You’re going too far!”

Anzu was the one stopping Chikage.

-“Up to now, Wakaba-san has always been the one fighting in the frontline. Even if that way of fighting was overbearing… It’s wrong to deny everything she has done”

-“…!”

Chikage walked to Anzu’s side and raised her hand.

But before she could swing that hand down, Tamako caught it, stopping her.

-“Stop that... If you make a move on Anzu, I won’t stay quite anymore”

As if the atmosphere had frozen, quietness returned to the hallway.

Admits the silence, Hinata turned her eyes to the direction of Yuunna and muttered.

-“I wonder when everyone is fighting like this… who is the one hurting the most…?”

After that, no one said anything, everyone returned to their own hospital room. Chikage was the only one remaining in front of the ICU.

-"Nogi-san, unless you change your way… I can't fight together with you anymore…"

While fixing her gaze at Yuuna, Chikage told Wakaba.

It was past bedtime already but Wakaba still couldn't fall asleep, she had been staring at the room's ceiling for a long time.

What Chikage told her at noon kept flashing through her mind, again and again.

(Fighting only for revenge, huh…)

Giving the enemies their return --- That was the principle of Wakaba's action. Returning the rage and sadness of those who had been killed and tormented to the Vertices. She had filled up herself with that one mindset and stood in the battlefield.

Now that it had been denied… just how should she fight from now on?

She didn't know.

The Wakaba right now was like a child who can't even stand steady on her feet. She had lost sight of her position, knowing not where she should head to, and was simply standing still in one place.

The next day, as all the treatments and examinations had been finished, and Wakaba and the others were discharged.

They still couldn't continue training as heroes yet but there wouldn't be any difficulties with their daily life.

However, even now, Yuuna still hadn't regained her consciousness. As for Wakaba, she still couldn't find out the answer to the doubt in her heart.

Tamako, Anzu, and Chikage were also discharged and had returned to the school, but their situation was different from before. Everyone remained quite even during breaks and lunch time.

By nature, it was Wakaba's job as the leader to change this atmosphere. However, she wasn't skilful enough to do it.

That night, Wakaba visited Hinata's room.

She was carrying a pillow in her arms, trying to take a hold of her anxiety.

When she opened the door, Hinata was busying packing her clothes, notes and other things.

-"What're you doing, Hinata?"

-"Ahh, Wakaba-chan, welcome in. I'm gathering my stuffs right now"



-"…? Why are you doing that?"

After finishing packing her stuffs, Hinata closed the zipper on bag and answered.

-"Tomorrow, I'll leave this dorm"

-"Eh!? D-did something happen!?"

Wakaba trembled, grasping her pillow tightly. Why would Hinata leave the dorm? Was it because her role as the [Attending Miko for Heroes] had changed? No, in the first place, a Miko's duty was never to attend on a Hero, so wasn't it more strange that Hinata had been staying in this dorm up to now? In that case, Hinata was just returning to her original role as a Miko---

As those thoughts were winding around in Wakaba's head, Hinata reassured her with a chuckle.

-"Wakaba-chan, stop shaking so much. I'm not leaving this dorm forever. It's only for a short period of time. I was called to Taisha's HQ"

Wakaba left out a relief sigh.

-"I, I see… But still, why so suddenly?"

It was really rare for them for them to be called up by Taisha. Since Taisha's staffs came in and out of Wakaba's school all the time, if there were any businesses, you could just tell them and vise versa.

Hinata's expression clouded up a little.

-"They didn't tell me the reason. That said, since the New Year started, a lot of things have happened… The scale of the last Vertices attack was incomparable to the ones before, a person was severely wounded…"

It had been several months since the Vertices' invasion on Shikoku started --- Right now, something might be trying to make a big move. Be it on the Vertices side, or on the human side…

-"By the way, Wakaba-chan, what kind of business do you have? It's midnight already"

-"Ah, uh, about that…"

Wakaba mumbled, finding it hard to start talking.

Seeing her childhood friend like that, Hinata sat down on the bed and patted her own laps.

While receiving Hinata's lap pillow, Wakaba started talking bit by bit.

The things Chikage told her.

The fact that she didn't know how she should fight from now on.

The doubt that she had been wrong this whole time ---





While she was talking, Wakaba was brought to tears. Since she was a child, Wakaba had never let other people saw her tears. However, Hinata was an exception. Only in front of her that Wakaba laid bare both her heart and body.

-"What should I do…?"

-"…"

Hinata couldn't answer Wakaba's question.

Whenever she was at lost, Wakaba had always come to Hinata for help. And Hinata had always answered her.

Against Wakaba who was bearing a heavy duty of a hero protecting the world---

As well as against the best friend whom she had spent time with ever since childhood, she wanted to do everything she could for her. Wakaba, who honestly relied on her and only her, was just so lovely.

However, was telling Wakaba the answer right here and now a right choice?

The main point of Wakaba's problem, as well as its solution, Hinata could put them into words for her. And then, the quick to learn Wakaba would immediately be able to improve the situation.

---Was that method really the right one?

Even if the problem was solved on the surface, nothing within Wakaba would change. No one aside from Hinata would notice, Wakaba's mental fragility would never disappear. And at that rate, Wakaba's life would possibly be put in danger.

-"…"

Wakaba waited for Hinata's words.

However, Hinata didn't give Wakaba the answer.

-"Wakaba-chan, you have to find the answer and overcome this problem yourself"

-"Eh…?"

Wakaba doubted her ears. Hinata's words--- even her gentle voice was thrusting her away.

Hinata wiped her childhood friend's tears with a handkerchief.

-"Now, please stop crying. Or I will snatch a pic of your crying face"

Taking out her smart phone, she pointed it towards Wakaba.

-"…Just take it if you like"

Wakaba pouted.

Hinata pushed the shutter button of her phone's camera.

-"You really took one…"

Wakaba glared at Hinata.

-"Well, from tomorrow, although it's just for a short time, I won't be able to meet you anymore, Wakaba-chan. So I need to replenish my share of Wakaba-chan"

Hinata looked at the picture of Wakaba she just took.

By the time I return from Taisha, this crying face will have turned to a positive one---

She wished.

-"Wakaba-chan, you definitely are able to overcome this problem yourself… I believe that you can"

Next day's early morning, in the faint light while the sun still hadn't risen, Hinata left the dorm, taken away by a Taisha's messenger. Because she didn't tell anyone about her departure time, no one was seeing her off.

On the way, she kept looking back at Marugame castle many times. She felt uneasy about leaving Wakaba, and the Heroes who were in gloomy mood.

However, as a miko under controlled of Taisha, Hinata didn't have the right to refuse their call. With painful reluctance, Hinata left the dorm behind.

Anzu, who woke up early by chance, was looking down at Hinata from the dorm's window.

-"Hinata-san…"

It was far, but she could still saw Hinata's face. If she thought about the current state of all the Heroes including Wakaba, Anzu could easily guess what Hinata was uneasy about.

That day, even when school had started, Wakaba was still down in a pit. Be it during classes or breaks, she didn't move even 1 step away from her seat, and kept hanging her head unmoving.

Furthermore, every now and then, she would let out a really deep sigh.

-"Haaahh~…"

Although it had been established that everyone would go to the cafeteria for lunch together, no matter how many time Tamako called out to Wakaba, there was no answer.

-"Are you a corpse?!"

Even when Tamako made a retort like that, Wakaba still didn't notice anything and just ignored her.

Tamako shrugged her shoulder and said to Anzu.



-“No good. Her soul has completely left”

-“…It can’t be helped. Considering what happened with Yuuna-san and now, even Hinata-san is not here…”

-“But still, if we just leave her like that, you know…”

It seemed like even the easy-going Tamako could not leave Wakaba alone right now.

In the end, until after school, Wakaba didn’t talk to anyone and just kept hanging her head the whole time.

(I guess even Hinata is fed up with me, huh…)

This morning, when Wakaba woke up, Hinata was no longer in the dorm anymore. It looked like she was already on her way to Taisha’s HQ. She couldn’t even see her off. She wondered why Hinata didn’t tell her about her departure time. If it was the normal her up until now, she would at least tell only Wakaba about the time. Coupled that with what happened yesterday’s night, Wakaba felt like she was rejected by Hinata.

-“Guess it can’t be helped, huh… Even though I’m the heroes’ leader, instead of protecting the other heroes, I went and put them in danger. Well then, parading around the city, whipping, crucifixion, imprisonment… Whatever kind of punishments, let’s just accept them all. Ufufu…”

When Wakaba was thinking about such thing, Anzu stood in front of her desk.

-“Wakaba-san”

-“…What?”

Wakaba raised her head and looked at Anzu with an ambitionless expression.

-“Let’s go outside for a bit!”

Dragged by Anzu, Wakaba left the school and went to the town.

The region around Marugame castle had been flourishing as a castle town though the ages, even now, many people were living their lives in the town areas. Thereafter the arrival of the Vertices 3 years ago, many people from outside had migrated to Shikoku.

(Suddenly taking me outside, what is she planning…?)

Wakaba walked, not understanding Anzu’s intention.

And then Anzu came to a stop in front of a certain house.

-“Three years ago, the college student living in this house was studying in Hiroshima university… On the day Vertices appeared… she was able to escape to Shikoku, but then the Sky fear syndrome started manifesting on her. Both she and her family have been suffering for a long time. But I heard that since the day they heard about the Heroes’ victory against the Vertices on the news, bit by bit, her mentality has started stabilizing and her condition has improved”

Wakaba listened to Anzu's words, still not understanding her intention.

Anzu begun walking again, and stopped in front of another house.

-"The family in this house has been living in Marugame city for a long time, they hold a strong attachment for the local. I heard that they said if the Heroes hadn't protected Shikoku, they would have lost their precious hometown"

Then she started walking again, and this time, stopped in front of an apartment building.

-"Most of the people living here are immigrants from Honshu and Kyushu. Many people evacuating to Shikoku from outside had lost their families, their jobs, and their house to the Vertices, they have lost their will to live. There have been lots of people trying to kill themselves. But I heard that after seeing the fighting Heroes, they have been becoming more optimistic"

Everyone living in Shikoku had been experiencing that tragedy from 3 years ago. And whether it was indirectly or directly, thanks to the Heroes protecting Shikoku, they could continue living right now.

-"I sometimes go for a walk around the town. And then I ask the townspeople about their life circumstances, there're also people who come to talk to me when they realize I'm a hero"

-"Is that so…?"

Wakaba almost never went out to the town. Her life was completed inside Marugame castle and the dorm, and since among the Heroes, Wakaba's face was the most well known, she was told to avoid going out as much as she could.

As they walked, Anzu kept stopping from time to time and talked about the townspeople's lives.

On the way, they met a woman pushing a baby cart.

When she looked at Wakaba's face, the woman stopped and looked surprised.

-"Um… Are you perhaps Nogi Wakaba-sama?"

As Wakaba nodded in confusion, the baby cart woman lowered her head and said "Thank you very much". Through her voice, they knew that she had said it from the bottom of her heart.

-"I… three years ago, I was evacuating from Shimane shrine alongside with Nogi-sama"

It looked like Wakaba had traveled with her and her husband when she led the evacuees from Shimane back to Shikoku.

It was thanks to Wakaba that their lives were saved.

And now, after three years, from the two lives Wakaba had saved, a new live was born.

-"This girl's name is [Wakaba]. I named her after Hero-sama… Really, thank you very much. Finally… I could say thanks to you in person"



Wakaba was allowed to hold the baby.

She could feel the warm and weight of a life.

The woman kept thanking her time over and over again while in tears.

After the woman had gone, Anzu told Wakaba.

-"This is what you've been protecting, Wakaba-san"

-"What I've been… protecting"

Dumbfounded, Wakaba repeated Anzu's words.

Something---

It felt like something inside Wakaba's heart was changing.

(I see…)

Wakaba closed her eyelids.

Even now, she could recall vividly the scene of the first day Vertices attacked. It had been burned to her mind.

The people being eaten right in front of her.

The classmates who were deformed completely.

The sight of the monsters wriggling around.

The devastated country.

No matter how much time past, those memories would still lingered in Wakaba's body like a nightmare.

(…All this time, I am trapped in those memories…)

It was a trauma.

The tragic event three years ago had left behind a deep wound within the young Wakaba's heart.

No matter how tough she acted, and even when she was strong enough to eradicate those monsters, that wound would still be there. That wound forced Wakaba to keep pursuing revenge for the death. Losing herself in anger in front of the Vertices, obsessing with revenge, everything was because of the deep, deep wound in her heart.

(But now… I have to get over it)

She must not stay as a prisoner of the past forever. Right now, Wakaba was responsible for the lives of many people.

Instead of the deaths, she had to fight for the livings.

Instead of those who had gone, she had to turn her gaze at the people beside her.

---Instead of somewhere faraway… I think it'd be better if you look at the people around you, at those close to you.

Finally, Wakaba was able to understand the words Hinata said that day.

-"So that's why Hinata was pushing me away…"

You need to realize your own weakness or there'd be no point. Because she thought about Wakaba, Hinata didn't say anything.

Anzu nodded, and smiled.

-"I saw Hinata-san leaving the dorm by chance. Her face looked extremely worried. I believed that she was definitely worried about you, Wakaba-san so I thought that I need to do something"

-"Thanks… Anzu, you're… a good fellow"

-"You're welcome. I'm not very reliable as a hero but I'm your comrade!"

Anzu said, puffing up her chest.

-"…There's no way you're not reliable. Everyone acknowledge the precision of your marksmanship, Anzu, I was also saved multiple times thanks to your covering fire from faraway. Besides, if not because of your quick-thinking, we wouldn't have won against that Vertex the other time"

-"Uh… I feel so embarrassed when you compliment me, Wakaba-san…"

When Wakaba and Anzu were talking while walking alongside each other, Tamako's head suddenly stuck out from between the two of them.

-"Why're you two having fun alone--? Let Tama join in too--"

-"Tamacchi-senpai? Why are you here?"

While Anzu was surprised, Anzu pushed out her lips.

-"Because Anzu and Wakaba left the school with such serious faces, so I was worried and chased after you guys. I was thinking that maybe you two were fighting. And then rather than fighting, it looks like you two're having fun talking with each other!"

-"…Sorry, looked like I made you worry"

-"I-It's not like I want you to apologize or anything!"

Or rather, it made her feels bad being apologized to like that, Tamako turned away.



-“So you were worried about us, Tamako… On top of boosting the team’s morale with your full of energy way of fighting, you also cares about your comrades like this. Tamako, you really are an irreplaceable comrade of mine”

-“Hah!? Wha-what’re you suddenly saying!? Ta-Tama won’t be fooled by those kind psychological tricks!”

As Tamako’s face reddened, she assumed a mysterious Kenpo-ish stance facing Wakaba.

-“Nahh, Tamacchi-senpai looks really easy to fool…”

Anzu murmured in a small voice.

-“…Did you say something? Anzu”

-“No no, nothing”

-“No, you definitely did say something! I got the feeling that you just said something really rude!”

While watching the two quarrelling, Wakaba thought.

That beside her, there were reliable and warmhearted comrades.

As long as she had these comrades, she would surely even triumph over her past wound.

-“Tamako, Anzu”

Wakaba bowed down to the two comrades that fight alongside her.

-“As long as you guys are by my side, I won’t lose to my own weakness and go rampant anymore.

That’s why… will you still fight together with me?”

Tamako and Anzu nodded at Wakaba’s words.

-“Certainly, Wakaba-san is our leader after all!”

-“Of course! Just leave it to Tama!”

That night, in Chikage’s room, Wakaba and she sat in seiza facing each other.

-“…”

-“…”

Time kept ticking by as the two remained silence.

Eventually---

-“I’m sorry, Chikage”





Wakaba bowed down deeply.

-"I was being arrogant. I was planning to fight by myself. I thought it was enough if I just keep defeating the Vertices alone. Because I was trapped in the past, I didn't look at the people around me, and even lost sight of myself. This is--- the result of my heart's weakness"

-"…"

Chikage listened to Wakaba's words in silence.

Wakaba raised her head, and stared at Chikage's eyes with earnestness.

-"From now on, I won't fight alone and act arrogant anymore. Rather than the deaths, I'll fight thinking about the livings… That's why, from now on too, I want you to fight alongside me"

Chikage stayed quiet for a while--- Finally, she slowly opened her mouth.

-"…No matter what you said, it's meaningless… Words alone… can't prove whether or not… you have really changed…"

-"…"

-"That's why… demonstrate it with your action. I will… watch you from the side"

-"…! So, does that mean---"

Chikage would also keep fighting alongside with Wakaba.

-"I also… might have said a bit too much…"

Chigake said, averting her eyes from Wakaba's in embarrassment.

It was the next day that Yuuna woke up.

Because her conscious had fully returned, and her condition had also stabilized, before long, she was moved to a room in the general ward. There were no injuries that could leave behind after-effect, it looked her recovery was going well.

-"Everyone was so worried and yet I recovered like it was nothing… Sorry for giving such a false alarm!!"

Yuuna said apologetically when Wakaba visited her.

-"The most important thing is that you're properly recovering. Besides… I'm the one who need to apologize. It was my fault that you was hurt this badly, Yuuna"

Yuuna was acting energetically, but there were still bandages left on her body. Even if they said her recovery was going well… Her wound was definitely not a light one.

Wakaba told Yuuna about the things that happened while she was unconscious.

Her fight with Chikage. How she had realized the weakness in her heart. How she came to know about the warm of her comrades.

And--- the fact that what she needed to value right now was those who were living, those who were beside her.

Yuuna quietly listened to Wakaba's words.

"Together with my mind and body, as a leader, I still am very immature but… I want you to fight alongside with me"

As Wakaba said that and bowed down, Yuuna took her hands and smiled.

"Of course I will, Wakaba-chan, I'm your friend after all. It might be true that you tend to overdo everything by yourself… but I'm certain that it's your action that has always motivated everyone. That's why, from now on, I'll always fight together with you"

"Thanks… I'm glad you said that"

Wakaba lifted up her head. Clearing of doubt, she looked refreshed with a new determination.

"Well, since you're still recovering, I shouldn't stay for too long. It's time for me to go"

However, Yuuna didn't let go of Wakaba's hands, stopping her on her track.

"It's fine, visiting hours still hasn't ended. The two of us don't usually talk like this after all, I want you to stay by my side for a bit longer… Wakaba-chan, somehow it feels like you've become gentler than before. I like the current Wakaba-chan more"

2019 AD

Even when mankind was approaching the time of twilight, the days kept on passing by.

Amidst that time, the girls continue to change and grow up.

And then---

Their trial was just about to begin.

(Chapter 7 – Fin)

DENGEKI G's

NOVEL

VOLUME EIGHT!!
08



ガーリッシュナンバー

著：渡 航　キャラクター原案・扉絵：QP:flapper
挿絵：やむ茶

アウトロー・ワンダーランド

原案：田中ロミオ
キャラクター原案・扉絵：saitom　著：波摘

SILENTWORLD

著：ごお　イラスト：空中幼彩

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい　イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

［ DENGEKI G's NOVEL ］ 電撃G's magazine 2016年4月号付録 分売不可



Maybe... No, it has to be.

...No, I'm sure of it!

There have to be other survivors besides us.

That just has to be the case.

For example, there seems to be high hopes for [redacted].

We've gotta keep working at it, for their sake too.

Hero Record Feb 2019 AD

Takashima Yuuna's Record

第八話
―灯花―

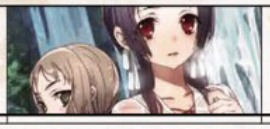
企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／
D.K&JW WORKS
監修／Project 2H



vol.8
Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JW WORKS
Supervision by Project 2H

乃木若葉は勇者である

©2014 Project 2H



Chapter 8 - Petals of Light

As a calm air drifted in their midst, the girls clad in white bathed in the waterfall.

Uesato Hinata was among them. Her long black hair and her white outfit clung to her wet skin. The exposure to the waterfall caused her flesh to flush faintly.

They were in a place near the 'Shinju', the centerpiece of Shikoku's protection. The girls bathing in the waterfall were the miko who were chosen by the gods and could hear their voice. They were currently cleansing their bodies in order to meet with the Shinju.

The midwinter air cooled the waterfall, causing a prickling pain in the girls' skin. They required strict discipline in order to keep their focus in light of that pain, but it was nonetheless imperative that they cleanse their bodies before they met the Shinju, as it was god itself.

-"Purify us, cleanse us, oh gods, protect us, bless us"

Hinata repeatedly recited that chant in her head with its peculiar rhythm. It was apparently a type of norito, or traditional Shinto prayer.

Since Hinata was not raised in a particularly Shinto family, she did not originally have any knowledge of rituals. Since she was bestowed with the public duty a miko entailed, people at the Taisha [TL: Grand Shrine] had taught her various mannerisms.

Many of the miko had been born in ordinary households without any connection to the Shinto priesthood or shrines, but a few girls did come from families of Shinto priests. According to those girls, the norito and mannerisms that the Taisha had taught the miko were only scratched the surface of those used in Shinto rituals.

'Since many of the girls originally had nothing to do with Shinto rituals, they're trying to minimize what they have to learn' -- That initial impression appeared to be incorrect. At one point, a girl from a family of Shinto priests nonchalantly tried to recite a norito that the Taisha did not teach. Upon hearing her, a member of the Taisha put on a stern face and admonished her, saying that it was 'inappropriate here'.

Those mannerisms and norito were not 'untaught'. They were 'forbidden'.

Ever since the appearance of the Vertexes, Shinto rituals had gradually begun to change.

And perhaps they would keep on changing.

Once the waterfall mediation was over and the girls had gotten out from the river, miko clothes were prepared for them.

-"Aww man, I thought I was a goner! It's so cold! And it hurts! It's the middle of winter and you expect us to meditate under a waterfall, Shinju-samaaa...?"

Aki Masuzu clamored in misery as she changed clothes. She was another miko, one year older than Hinata. Despite their age difference, the two of them got along surprisingly well.

As Aki wiped her braided hair, she spoke to Hinata in a discontented voice.

-"Mmm, anyway, Uesato-chan, I'm surprised you can take on waterfall mediation like it's nothing."

-"? Why's that?"

-"I mean you normally don't do this sort of ceremony, do you?"

Since Hinata was a miko closely associated with the heroes, she normally lived in Marugame Castle alongside them. Thus, she rarely had a direct audience with the Shinju and so this would be her first experience with winter waterfall meditation. In contrast, Aki and the other girls normally spent their time at the Taisha, and since they were near the Shinju every day, waterfall meditation was an everyday occurrence for them.

-"But look at me! I never get used to it no matter how many times I do it! There has to be some sort of physical reason... I guess it's gotta be all that boob blubber??"

Aki smirked at Hinata.

-"Wh-what are you trying to say...?"

-"That mass of blubber concentrated in your chest area's gotta be insulating your heart from any obstructions. That's why you're so resilient to the cold. And I get the feeling you've been growing even more lately!"

-"...!"

That comment caused Hinata to cover her chest in a panic.

-"Ahahah. That's a good thing. Boobs are a girl's greatest weapon."

Though she had often experienced breast envy coming from Tamako and other girls, Hinata often thought that slender frames like Wakaba's were more beautiful than her own.

Hinata wiped her body and changed clothes.

-"But I don't think waterfall meditation is really all that harsh. Sure, the water did feel piercing cold... but oddly enough, I felt a little bit of warmth."

-"You might have an extra helping of divine protection, Uesato-chan. I mean, the Shinju-sama does like you the best, after all."

Hinata apparently had the highest aptitude as a miko among all the people at the Taisha. The reason she was called back to the Taisha was also perhaps out of a need for Hinata's high ability level since they had received an important oracle.

-"By the way, Uesato-chan?"

-"Yes?"



Aki hesitated to ask her question as she looked for her words.

-"Umm~... Are those girls, well... are they doing okay?"

'Those girls' referred to Tamako and Anzu.

-"They're doing well. Tamako-san's so energetic that Anzu-san's getting tired out trying to pull the brakes on her. But Anzu-san's enjoying it too. Those two get along well, after all."

-"That's fine, I guess. I mean, they -are- heroes, so of course they can handle themselves."

Aki spoke bluntly, sounding considerably disinterested.

-"Aki-san, you really do worry about Tamako-san and Anzu-san, huh?"

Aki came from Ehime prefecture-- right by where Tamako and Anzu had lived. On the day the Vertexes appeared, she had met with Tamako right after gaining her miko powers. It was Aki who had told Tamako of Anzu's location and told her to save her.

Afterwards, the three of them worked together until they reached the protective care of the Taisha. Ever since then, Aki had always been worried about Tamako and Anzu.

-"It's not like I'm worried about them or anything. I was just thinking that those two are such polar opposites and they're so childish that they might be a nuisance to everyone around them. Look, I was the miko that guided them at one point, so I feel a little responsible for them. But just a teensy bit."

Aki's long-winded explanation made it undeniable that she was worried about them in the end. But perhaps she had yet to realize it herself.

Hinata took out her smartphone from her personal belongings and showed the pictures on it to Aki. Among the collection were pictures of Tamako and Anzu.

After she had seen them, Aki's face visibly relaxed in relief.

-"Oh. They look like they don't have a care in the world. They're perfectly fine then. It was a waste to worry about them."

So you were worried after all-- Hinata thought about pointing that out, but decided against it since it would be in poor taste.

Though Aki had relaxed her face, she then quickly furrowed her eyebrows.

-"Anyway, Uesato-chan..."

-"Yes?"

-"... You've got way too many pictures of Nogi-chan. This folder's mostly nothing but pictures of her."

"That's because it's my life's work."

Hinata puffed up her chest in pride.

After the waterfall meditation, the miko walked in a single file line to the place where the Shinju was enshrined. From the area's circumference, they could hear something that sounded like a low, monotonous song.

--IN DAYS OF OLD, WHEN THIS LAND WAS BARREN AND THE... HALF-LEAF ALSO OFTEN VIOLENTLY... HE HAD FULLY WOVEN THE... KUNITSUKURI OHOANAMUCHI [THE LAND CREATOR]... THEN THE ASHIHARA [THE REED PLAINS--

If they looked around, they could see people wearing unmarked white garments standing in the shade of the trees surrounding the area, reciting a norito. Their chanting voices shrouded the entire place, making it seem as if it were a spirit realm.

That said, this was the heart of Shikoku, the location of the Shinju, which was god itself. It was unmistakably a 'spirit world'.

--THE DWELLING PLACE OF... LIKE AN ENDLESS, TORTUROUS ROPE... OVER ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY INTERTWINED... ITS BOARDS WIDE AND SPACIOUS... DRED AND EIGHTY SHIELDS STITCHED...--

As they walked the undeveloped path, Hinata thought about her friends back at Marugame Castle.

She wondered if Wakaba was able to get back on her feet.

She wondered if the heroes were able to get back on their feet from the hardships they faced.

She wondered if Yuuna was able to recover from her serious injuries.

Even though only a day had passed since she had left Marugame Castle, she couldn't get those girls off her mind.

-(I can't believe I'm this upset after just one day...)

In contrast, Aki hadn't seen Anzu or Tamako for over a year.

Many of the miko had to have been living far away from their family, friends, and loved ones as well.

If just a single day had been this tough on Hinata, then how hard must it have been on those other girls?

--IF THE SACHITAMA [THE PROPITIOUS SPIRITS] AND THE KUSHIKIMITAMA [THE MIRACULOUS SPIRITS]... THAT SHINE THE DIVINE LIGHT... APPEASE THE... THEN THE OHOKUNITAMA NO KAMI...--



-"Hey."

Aki whispered to Hinata from behind.

-"The Taisha people will get mad if you talk, you know."

-"They're probably too busy chanting their norito to even notice us. I'm sure the Shinju-sama won't mind either, as long as we don't make too much of a fuss. How could he stay mad at such cute miko like us just for talking a little bit when we gallantly work our butts off all the time to serve him?"

-"Praising your own cuteness and gallantry just diminishes both, you know..."

Aki disregarded Hinata's exasperation and continued talking.

-"Did you know that contact with Suwa City has ceased?"

-"... Yes, I know. Wakaba-chan was the one contacting Suwa after all."

Similarly to Shikoku, Suwa had also formed a barrier through the power of the gods. A hero named Shiratori had been opposing the Vertex invasion there. However, all communications with Suwa had ceased after last September.

That did not mean Suwa's destruction was 100% confirmed. However, there was probably... little possibility that people had survived there.

-"I see, so you knew about Suwa then, huh. Then did you know that they found a place where there could be other survivors?"

-"! Where?"

Hinata shouted without thinking... but the people chanting the norito did not seem to notice.

-"It hasn't been confirmed yet, and they don't know exactly where the place is, but apparently... there have been faint survivor responses in the mainland to the north and various islands to the southwest."

-"... I see."

She could feel hope gushing forth from her heart.

People survived in other places besides Shikoku. Humanity isn't over yet. It has yet to be defeated. Wakaba and the others would surely be happy to hear about it once she got back.

-"We haven't found any, but it's possible there are surviving areas in Honshu. Suwa hasn't necessarily been destroyed either, you know?"

-"Yes, that is true."

All they knew was that communications with Suwa had ceased. That could perhaps simply be due to machinery failure or disconnection of the communications line.

There was still hope.

--THE IMPERIAL THRONE OF HEAVEN AND EARTH... THE COMMONERS... THOSE PEOPLE... WITHOUT VARIOUS CALAMITIES... GUARDING THROUGH THE NIGHT, GUARDING THROUGH THE DAY--

-"Say, Uesato-chan... Humanity sure is strong, huh."

-"Yes, it truly is..."

Over the long course of its history, humanity had confronted countless calamities. And each time, humanity came to a halt and shed tears. But in the end, humanity would stand back up with its own power and recover.

-"I'm sure humanity will stand back up once more. We can reclaim our world."

-"Yes, I believe so too."

Believe. Wish. Pray.

That was all the miko could do as they had no battle power of their own.

-"And, well, once we reclaim our world... I can play with Tamako and Anzu-chan without anyone having to worry about anything like miko and heroes. I can see my mom every day. And I've got a little brother too. He's such a brat, but he's cute. Right now... he's hospitalized due to "uranophobia", but I'm sure he'll get better once the world's back to normal..."

Hinata decided not to look at Aki's face as she spoke. She could tell she was crying from her hoarse voice alone.

Hinata had often imagined.

If this world were at peace...

If this world returned to normal...

The girls fighting as heroes and the girls living cloistered lives as miko could live entirely different lives.

They could work up a sweat in club activities after school. They could wrack their brains studying for tests. They could chat in family restaurants until the sun went down and get scolded by their mothers when they got back home late. Maybe some girls could even fall in love with boys and live for romance.

Ordinary, common, yet warm, precious lives.

--WE OBEY... SHEDDING TEARS... UNDER CALM RECONSIDERATION OF KANNAWOBI [DIVINE RENEWAL GOD]... SAWOSHIKA'S EAR...AND GOVERN...--

-(We'll return to those days... for sure.)



Hinata swore resolutely upon her heart.

Finally, the Shinju appeared at the end of the path.

That tree made its appearance in Shikoku after the Vertex invasion of 2015. It is enshrined by the Taisha and said to be god itself.

The Shinju bestows the miko with oracles, and the heroes with the power to fight. The establishment of the barrier around Shikoku, as well as the phenomenon of Forestization are both said to be the Shinju's doing.

The Shinju doesn't merely provide oracles, hero power, and Shikoku's protection. It has an effect on biology. Heroes mobilize with the fusion of the Shinju's power and the power of humans, but examination of the heroes' bodies has apparently led to rapid advancements in the research of cell biology and human physiology.

Hinata's body tensed up as she stood before the Shinju.

Despite having been talking up to that point, Aki had shut her lips tight as well.

Dozens of adults were lined on both sides from the Shinju to the miko, genuflecting on both hands and knees with their heads down. They were forming a passage for the miko to walk towards the Shinju. Their faces were all tensed.

The ones bowing their heads and the ones chanting the norito were all members of the Taisha.

The members comprising the Taisha were qualified priests from all shrines. Being polytheistic, though their enshrined deities were distinct, they each made up one single "Taisha". The Shinju's overwhelming presence was the impetus that allowed that to happen.

The miko passed through the passage formed by the Taisha people toward the Shinju, with Hinata leading the group.

Once Hinata was face to face with the Shinju, she instinctively knelt and bowed her head.

-(You often hear about it in legends... but humans cannot stand before gods. It really is true--)

After bowing her head once, she was able to relax as if she had been given some sort of reprieve.

Hinata touched the Shinju's trunk with her hand.

It felt mysteriously warm. As if she were touching a living being.

-(The Shinju-sama-- is alive...)

The next moment, Hinata's body became warm and she felt as if something were flowing into her through her hand contact with the Shinju.

-"...Mmgh"

The warmth in her body eventually concentrated into her head and she felt feverishly groggy. She lost her sense of balance, her senses dulled, and her sight grew dark and narrow--

-"Uesato-chan!? What's going on--"

-"Uesato-sama!"

-"Not good. Her pupils are dilating--"

She could hear voices. But those voices faded into the distance one by one.

Eventually, Hinata's consciousness became fully submerged into the darkness.

When she woke up, Hinata found herself lying down in a futon. She was apparently in one of the shrine's rooms. Aki and several other miko were sitting by the futon's side, watching over her.

-"You're awake! Thank goodness..."

Hinata looked to see a relieved Aki.

-"Uesato-chan, has your consciousness cleared up? Do you know who I am?"

-"Yes... I'm okay, Aki-san."

As she spoke, Hinata's face went pale white. She shivered as if she were freezing.

-"Uesato-chan? What's wrong? You're shivering."

-"The oracle..."

-"--What did you see?"

Aki peered into Hinata's eyes with a serious expression on her face.

-"Countless little stars filled the dark sky... And then fell like meteors... Several of the small stars combined into a brilliance unlike anything I've ever seen..."

As soon as they heard Hinata's words, Aki instructed the surrounding miko to inform the Taisha people. Several miko nodded and left the room on quick feet.

Hinata understood the meaning of the imagery the Shinju had conveyed to her.

-"... There's going to be a general offensive before too long. The number of invading Vertexes will far surpass anything we've ever seen before..."



The next day, Hinata returned to Marugame Castle. She was tasked with informing the heroes about the oracle and working out preparations for the next invasion.

When Hinata entered her dormitory room in Marugame Castle, she saw Wakaba sitting there in formal seiza position.

-"Hinata, I want to thank you."

Her expression was overly serious as usual, but something about her tone of voice made it sound like a load had been taken off her shoulders. Her eyes were shining with a light that showed she had found her way.

Wakaba told Hinata about what happened after she had left Marugame Castle.

How Wakaba had noticed her own weaknesses, settled things out with their friends, and promised never to be reckless again--

-"... That's great, Wakaba-chan..."

-"Yeah. It's because you believed in me and watched over me that I learned of my own weakness in the truest sense. Thank you, Hinata..."

Wakaba had found out her own weakness and overcome it on her own, just as Hinata believed she would.

-"I knew you could do it, Wakaba-chan. I'm proud to be your childhood friend."

She smiled. She strongly felt that Wakaba would now be able to stand up to whatever battles would come her way from now on.

Hinata gazed directly at Wakaba's face.

-"Wakaba-chan. There's something I need to tell all of the heroes."

Hinata told the heroes about the Vertexes' impending general offensive. Since the invasion would be more severe than anything they faced before, the reality of the word "death" weighed heavily upon the heroes.

That said, they were by no means pessimistic. Perhaps Wakaba's emotional growth had an effect on the others as well.

Hinata then told the heroes about the possibility of human survival in places other than Shikoku.

They had found hope. The heroes all felt that they couldn't let Shikoku be destroyed. For Shikoku's sake, and for the sake of the survivors in other areas as well.

As Hinata looked at them, she thought to herself--

Once the battle began, she'd have no power at all by herself.

So she prayed.

That they would all return safe and sound.

After hearing about the Vertexes' full-scale attack, Wakaba thought about what she needed to do.

-(I need to face everyone as leader again...)

And what she came up with was that she needed to build up mutual understanding among all the heroes. She couldn't fight all by herself. If they failed to reach an understanding on the battlefield, then they'd be unable to demonstrate their powers to the fullest extent.

If all the heroes understood each other's thoughts and personalities, then they could minimize any hesitation and friction after the battle commenced. And then everyone would likely be able to demonstrate their powers to the fullest extent.

And thus, Wakaba decided that she should talk with all of the heroes.

It didn't matter what they talked about. As long as they communicated, it should help them understand each other.

-"The biggest problem is if the enemy splits up into several groups and attacks separately like they did before, huh. The bigger the Vertexes' numbers, the more possible that becomes."

"Mmhmm, mhmm..."

Wakaba and Anzu discussed strategy over a map of the Kagawa area.

Though Anzu wasn't as effective as the other heroes in melee combat, she was the best among the heroes in terms of knowledge and clever exploitation of enemy weaknesses. Wakaba held a strategy meeting with her, thinking that perhaps she could come up with some good ideas for the upcoming large-scale battle.

-"But there's nothing we can do about the Vertexes' overwhelming advantage in numbers... Hmm..."

Anzu pondered as she looked at the map.

Her eagerness to think made her look very promising to Wakaba.

-"Thanks, Anzu."

Wakaba calmly said that.

-"What's this all of a sudden?"

Anzu looked at Wakaba, slightly confused.

-"You called out to me when I was down, Anzu. Back then-- I felt really helpless."

And with that, Wakaba embraced Anzu.



"I was beginning to lose faith in myself and Hinata wasn't there to support me. I'm... really glad you talked with me, Anzu."

Anzu smiled gently as Wakaba admitted to her own weaknesses.

"... Wakaba-san, you're more of a little puppy than you appear to be at first glance. I can tell why Hinata-san likes taking care of you so much now."

"...!"

Wakaba's face turned red, but she still found Anzu's gentle tone of voice pleasant.

"--Oh, I know!"

Anzu nodded as if she had remembered something.

"Wakaba-san, if all the heroes gather around you, we might be able to pull off a fighting style we haven't done before."

"What kind of style...?"

"We'll use battle formations. After wars became centered on guerrilla tactics, battle formations started to see use only in sports, but military history shows several instances of battles being won because of them."

Wakaba and Anzu looked back over the map and continued their strategy meeting.

On another day--

Wakaba and Tamako went to "Ichikame", a famous local honetsukidori restaurant. Honetsukidori is a chicken leg roasted with the bone still in, a gourmet cuisine local to Marugame City. The dish is beloved in not just Marugame, but all over Kagawa Prefecture as well.

Since Wakaba and Tamako had gained a high degree of popularity as heroes, the other customers kept glancing at them, but it was no problem as long as they paid it no heed.

Wakaba and Tamako held up the honetsukidori with a napkin wrapped around the bone part as they sank their teeth into the steamy flesh.

An aromatic scent tickled their nostrils. The meat juices and special sauce intertwined with the chicken leg flesh, giving birth to an exquisite flavor.

"Delicious!"

"Honetsukidori's definitely the way to go for chicken meat. It goes well with the rice too."
Wakaba alternated bites of honetsukidori with rice while Tamako wholeheartedly went for the honetsukidori only.

-"And 'chick' meat is definitely the way to go for honetsukidori! It's way better than 'hen' meat!"

There are two kinds of honetsukidori. "Chick" uses spring chickens while "hen" uses more mature chicken meat. "Chick" is more plump, tender, and easier to eat, while "hen" has a deeper flavor that oozes out the more you chew on its tougher meat.

-"Hold on. I can't just let you say that as if it were fact, Tamako. The true deliciousness of honetsukidori lies in the 'hen' meat. True, 'chick' meat is easier to eat and thus preferred by many people, but 'hen' meat is its true form..."

-"Mmmgh! That's not true at all! Easier to eat means it's more delicious, obviously. The 'chick' meat that you can just keep digging into is the true form..."

Wakaba's piercing line of sight crossed with Tamako's.

The chick camp and hen camp of the honetsukidori faithful would often clash.

Starting with Tamako, the two girls stood up, honetsukidori still in hand.

-"Wakaba... looks like there can only be one."

-"You stole the words right out of my mouth. 'Chick' or 'Hen'? Let's see which one remains vic--"

Just then, as if to interrupt Wakaba, she felt something tugging at her clothes.

When she looked down, she saw a small girl pulling at the cuff of her sleeve.

-"Ms. Hero, please don't fight. All honetsukidori is yummy!"

-"..." "..."

Wakaba and Tamako were at a loss for words. They blushed and sat back down in their chairs.

The girl's mother, who was sitting at a nearby table apologized for her daughter's rudeness towards the honorable heroes, but Wakaba and Tamako felt more like they were the ones who had to apologize.

As they returned to eating, Wakaba and Tamako calmed down and talked again.

-"That girl's right. 'Chick' meat and 'hen' meat both have their good points. They're both delicious."

-"Yeah. It's great to have such variety!"

Similarly the two heroes had their own variety.

Wakaba had a serious disposition, while Tamako was an energetic type. They both had their good points.

-"Okay, then I'm done with this 'chick' meat here! Eat some of this and get it into your tama-tummy!"

-"Sure. In that case, take this 'hen' meat, then..."

Wakaba and Tamako exchanged some of their honetsukidori and ate them together.



On yet another day--

Wakaba visited Chikage's room.

-"Chikage, let's play games!"

-"...?"

Chikage was caught off guard by the sudden proposal.

Wakaba held out a portable game console and game in front of Chikage. The game was a newly released title from a popular series. Though it was a fantasy game, it wasn't one of the variety of heroes fighting demon lords, but rather an action game with the goal of finding various kinds of monsters and hunting them.

-"I only recently started playing this game, but it can be played co-op, right? I heard co-op's the real meat of the game."

-"...ph."

Chikage smiled.

Of course, Chikage owned the same game Wakaba held out. And she was really into it. She had raised her player character considerably and her equipment and stats were of the highest rank.

-(She's only just recently jumped on the bandwagon... And she wants to play co-op with my player character-- "C Shadow"? ... I'll show her the difference in our abilities...!)

Chikage took out her own portable game console.

They established the wireless connection and their characters appeared on the same field.

-"I started out thinking it'd be just a time waster, but it's a lot more interesting than I thought it'd be. I'm addicted now. I've been playing solo up until now, but I came across an enemy I just couldn't beat... So I was thinking you could help me if you were playing this game too, Chikage."

The monster that Wakaba was having difficulty with was said to be the most difficult enemy of the early stages of the game.

Chikage and Wakaba stood up against that monster together.

-"... You've really changed, haven't you..."

Chikage muttered as she operated her game console.

-"Hmm? Did you say something?"

Chikage shook her head at Wakaba's puzzled question.

-"No... It's nothing..."



Before Wakaba had changed, she probably would have kept on playing solo to beat the monster without making any progress. But now, she was able to trust in other people and ask for help.

And even in the game, Wakaba was able to keep up pace with Chikage in battle. She wasn't carelessly rushing in on her own, but rather playing a support role to help the strong Chikage, and only going in for vital, precise attacks. Chikage was able to play a more pleasant game than when she was playing solo.

-"I thought about it back at the onsen visit too, but... you really have a talent for games..."

-"Really? That's actually reassuring coming from you, Chikage."

-"You should really... foster that talent. I'll lend you some games I recommend... You can start out with these twenty or so games suitable for beginners..."

-"T-twenty!? And those are just the ones for beginners!?"

-"Heheh..."

At another time--

Wakaba visited Yuuna's hospital room to see how she was doing.

As soon as Wakaba entered, a bright voice greeted her.

-"Wakaba-chan! It looks like I can finally leave the hospital!"

Yuuna got out of bed and stood on the floor. She had taken off her bandages to show that her injuries were pretty much all gone. Was her surprisingly quick recovery due to her own merits, or due to the blessings of the Shinju?

-"I've been out of practice for so long, so once I get back to school, I gotta train hard!"

Yuuna took a kempo stance as she said that.

Wakaba smiled wryly upon seeing Yuuna's overflowing energy.

-"Try not to push yourself, though. You've only just finished recovering. Now then..."

Though she had come to talk with Yuuna, Wakaba didn't think of what to talk about.

Hobbies?

Martial arts?

Favorite foods?

She felt a little indecisive now.

-"... Yuuna, is there anything you'd like to do?"

Wakaba asked in a fit of desperation.

-"Huh? What's this all of a sudden?"

-"Ahhh, well, I thought I'd do something to celebrate your discharge, that's all! Anything at all."

-"Hmm... Then... I guess I'd like to clean your ears."

Yuuna said so as she gently touched Wakaba's ear.

-"Clean my ears?"

-"Yeah! Hina-chan said 'Wakaba-chan's weakness is ear cleaning', so I've always wanted to try doing it for you."

-"..."

Dammit, Hinata. Why'd you have to go and say that-- Wakaba thought, but it really wasn't that big a deal to let her clean her ears. It might give her a good opportunity to hold a conversation, after all.

-"Okay. If it's just cleaning my ears, that's fine."

-"Yay! Then lie down on my bed."

Wakaba lay down and rested her head on Yuuna's lap.

-"Okay, then here we gooo!"

-"Yeah."

Yuuna brought a cotton swab into Wakaba's ear.

-(Now then, what should I talk with Yuuna about...?)

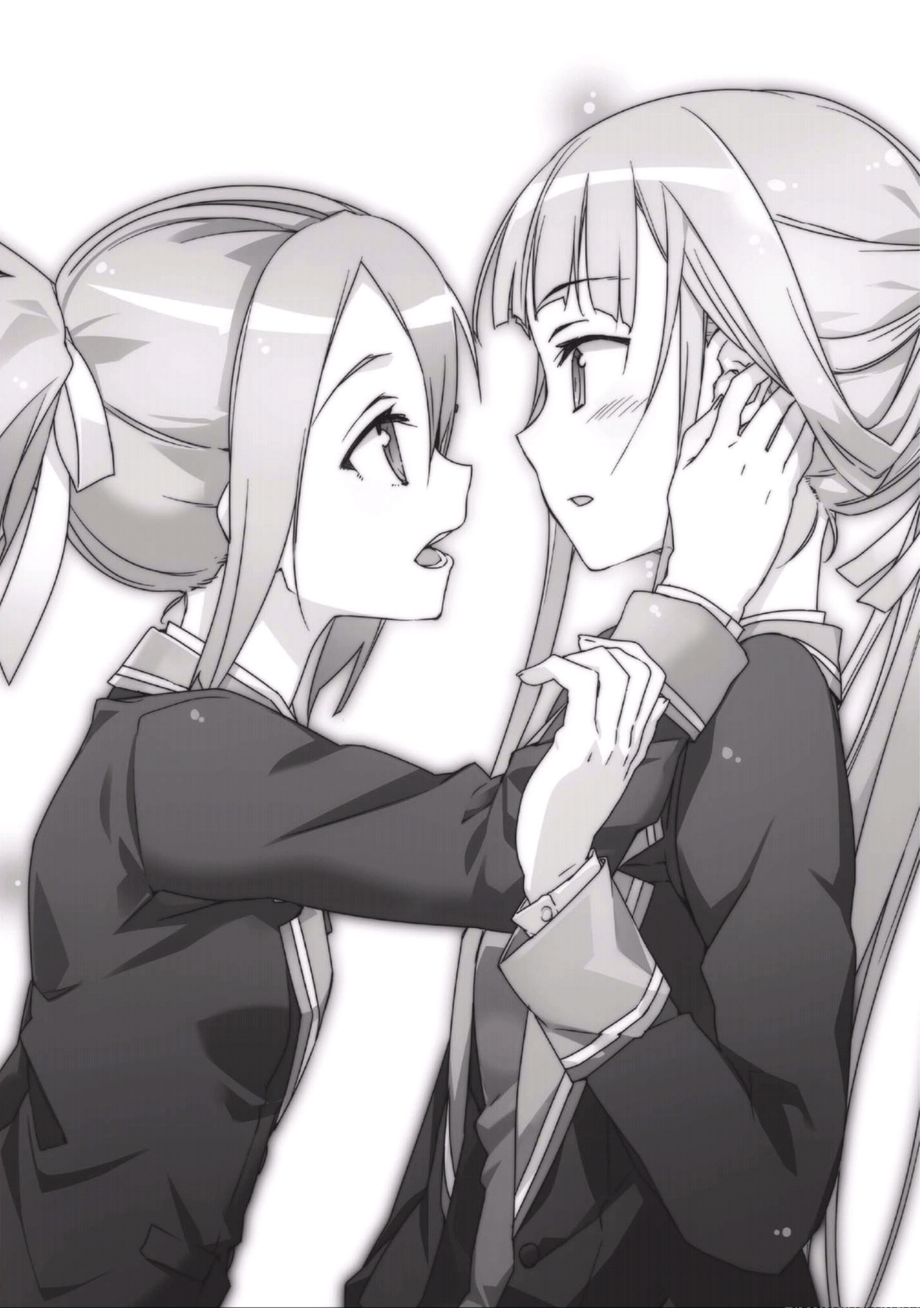
Right as that thought crossed Wakaba's mind.

-"!?"

A pleasant sensation wrapped itself around Wakaba's entire body, as if each and every one of her nerves relaxed at the same time. All Yuuna was doing was cheerfully humming as she cleaned Wakaba's ears-- but not even Hinata was a match for a technique like that.

-"...!!"

Wakaba tried searching for a topic to talk about-- but she had no composure to think at all.



The heroes spent their time together as their feelings mixed and mingled.

The fierce battle foretold in the oracle in the midst of the war of humanity's last stand would later be called "The Battle of Marugame Castle".

The girls would stake their lives to protect the last glimmer of hope--

(Chapter 8 End)



I've noticed something.

The small fries have been quickly evolving.

But whatever, Tama's been doing some evolving of her own, so no biggie.

Heart. Technique. Physique. Tama's been growing in all three areas these past few years.

Let me just say that Tama's graceful movements

are gonna blow everyone's minds ta-mashed bits!.

But wasn't the reason the small fries came out in the first place

because Shinju-sama was [redacted]?

Hero Record Feb 2019 AD

Doi Tamako's Record


vol.9
Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JW WORKS
Supervision by Project 2H
第九話
光華
企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JW WORKS
監修／Project 2H
乃木若葉は勇者である
©2014 Project 2H



Countless stars filled the sky.

The stars outnumbered anything anyone has ever seen.

Several stars combined into an even brighter brilliance.

They fell like meteors.

Eating away at the earth--

--Such was the oracle Uesato Hinata received from the Shinju.

Signifying an incoming general offensive from the Vertexes.

And there was one more thing the Taisha had noticed.

Stars combining their brilliance... could possibly signify Vertex evolution, and in that case...

Just how far could that strengthen the Vertexes?

Would they just blindly increase in size, or would they guide their evolution into an intentional "form"?

The prophesized invasion occurred less than half a month after the oracle.

As they gazed down upon the metamorphosed landscape of the Jukai, the heroes stood at upon the fortified walls of Marugame Castle.

They could see the Vertex horde advancing from beyond the Seto Inland Sea.

Wakaba tried using her smartphone map to estimate the invading enemy's numbers. But it was a futile attempt as there were enough of them to cover the entire map. They were probably far beyond one or two thousand.

-"Looks like they're quite literally 'innumerable'..."

Wakaba muttered with a stern expression on her face.

It would be a battle even more severe than the last-- She had known that fact beforehand, but no preparation would lessen the anxiety of seeing this situation face-to-face.

As Wakaba worried, Yuuna poked her in the cheek with her finger.

-"Wakaba-chan, you're furrowing your eyebrows! No need to make such a scary face. We're definitely going to win."

-"... You're right."

Thanks to Yuuna's smile, Wakaba was able to relax her furrowed brow. How could she call herself a leader if she allowed her anxiety to spread to the others?

-"Oh yeah, let's do the thing!"

-"What thing?"

Tamako tilted her head to the side at Yuuna's words.

-"You know, that thing where we form a circle with our arms around each other's shoulders and shout 'Let's do this!'"

-"A huddle, huh. Now that you mention it, ball game teams at my old school used to do that."

-"... That might be nice."

Wakaba, Yuuna, Tamako, and Anzu formed a circle shoulder-to-shoulder.

Chikage's eyes wandered as she hesitated about what to do.

-"C'mon, you too, Gun-chan!"

Yuuna held out her hand to Chikage.

-"... Okay."

Though a little confused, Chikage took her hand. Yuuna dragged her into the circle.

Wakaba then spoke up as leader.

-"We've found hope-- hope that humans have survived outside of Shikoku. And as long as we have that hope, we cannot afford to lose. Let's protect Shikoku until the end once more! Fight--"

-"ON!!"

The five heroes' voices rang out in unison.

The strategy Anzu came up with to counter this general offensive was to use battle formations. The five heroes deployed to designated locations with assigned roles to intercept the Vertexes.

The interception was centered on Marugame Castle. The area around Marugame castle was chosen because it was still not covered completely covered in vegetation even during forestization.

In the areas in front of Marugame castle, the center, east, and west sides were to be stationed by one hero apiece. Anzu would stay on standby at the rear. The remaining person would rest.

The three in front line would defeat the attacking Vertexes, and any enemies that slipped through would be shot down by Anzu with her superior long-range attacks. If any of the three in front line were to show signs of fatigue, they would switch places with the one resting.

Judging by the sheer number of enemies, this battle was surely to be a prolonged one. But if they rested in rotation as they fought, they would be able to deal with the drawn-out fighting.



Furthermore, there was an extreme fatigue associated with using the trump card, so its use was to be avoided as much as possible.

-"I'll stand front and center of Marugame Castle,"

Wakaba said after they huddled.

-"That's where the Vertex horde will be concentrated at, so it's gotta be the most difficult position... Are you sure?"

Wakaba responded to Yuuna's concerns with calm dignity.

-"That's exactly why I have to take that position."

-"... Why? Because you want... to kill the most Vertexes...?"

Chikage stared long and hard at Wakaba as if to peek into her heart.

Wakaba shook off that gaze with a light laugh.

-"No. It's to fulfill my duty as leader-- And above all, to protect the people of Shikoku."

Her friends' faces relaxed to hear her answer. Though Chikage alone seemed still somewhat unconvinced.

-"Gotcha. Welp, take care of the front then, Leader!"

"Please don't push yourself too hard, Wakaba-chan!"

Tamako and Yuuna patted Wakaba on the shoulder.

-"In that case, Wakaba-san takes the front, Yuuna-san takes the east side, and Tamacchi-sempai takes the west side. Chikage-san waits on standby for now. Let's begin!"

With the role of commander, Anzu gave out the instructions and the girls leaped to their respective posts.

Wakaba stood atop the Marugame City Office rooftop just in front of Marugame Castle. The cloud of Vertexes had already crossed the sea and were drawing near. Wakaba would be facing the brunt of the enemy's forces head-to-head.

-"Just my luck, a place called 'Nogimaru', huh... I can't afford to mess up."

She held her sword grip as she gazed at the Vertex horde.

But at that moment--

She felt something wrap around her foot. Wakaba looked down. Countless black human-shaped shadows were grasping at her foot. The shadows' faces warped in anger and hatred as they looked up at her.

-"...!"

Wakaba tensed up.

The mass of shadows was the past itself that had driven Wakaba to rage--

-"Wakaba-chaaan!!"

Just then, a loud voice rang out as if to scoop up Wakaba's consciousness from the dark depths. When she turned around, she saw Yuuna shouting with all her might from the roof of the building to the right.

-"Calm dowwwwn!!! Hang in there, Leaderrrr!!"

-"... Yeah, leave it to me!!"

Wakaba shouted back in reply.

By that time, the black shadows wrapping around her foot had already disappeared.

The advance units of the Vertex horde approached the city office building.

At the same time, Wakaba unsheathed her sword.

One by one, Wakaba cut down the attacking Vertexes-- as Yuuna watched from the east side.

-"Awrrighty! I gotta give it my best too!"

Yuuna clenched her fists and stood up to face the Vertexes.

On the west side--

Tamako was slaughtering Vertexes one after the other as she threw her bladed yo-yo.

-"Perfect! Wakaba's not gonna get all the glory! Tama's going ta-match her!"

The heroes faced off the Vertexes from the front and sides. This way they could avoid a situation like last time where someone could get surrounded by the Vertex horde.

As Anzu watched the three fight from the fortified walls of Marugame Castle, she held her hand to her chest in relief. Since they couldn't simulate how a battle with the Vertexes would go beforehand, there was no guarantee that the strategy would work out well. However, the strategy was succeeding at present.

-"Sorry, An-chan! There's one heading your way!"

Yuuna's voice rang out.

-"Please leave it to me!"



Anzu readied her crossbow and fired an arrow at the Vertex that had slipped past Yuuna. Though fighting large numbers of enemies was not Anzu's strong point, she excelled in the strategic, accurate kills of individual enemies over a long, wide range. She steadily shot down any Vertexes that escaped the fierce attacks of the three in the front line.

And since she was in the rear, she had a bird's-eye view of the progression of the battle.

-"Tamacchi-sempai, there's a group of them approaching from down below, skimming the earth's surface! You should be able to reach them with your bladed yo-yo!"

-"Roger! Leave it to Tama!"

-"Yuuna-san, you're sticking out a little too far! Fall back just a little, please!"

-"Got it!"

As she watched the situation develop, Anzu would direct the three in the front line from time to time.

Though she was somewhat timid by nature, that nature of hers made her the best suited for observing the situation and making precise, objective judgments. She never expected what she thought was her weakness to prove to be so useful. So in her heart, Anzu felt thankful for her timidity.

With just four heroes, they were able to maintain a complete advantage against numbers that surpassed even the last battle's.

As she watched them from the same castle walls as Anzu, Chikage grew impatient.

(I can't believe... I have to stay put here...)

There was no value in a hero that did not fight.

Chikage tightened her grip around her weapon, a scythe.

(How can I stay put... when I need to kill as many Vertexes... as I possibly can...)

-"Chikage-san."

As if to interrupt her thoughts, Anzu spoke up.

-"There is no need to rush. Every single member is vital for this style of battle to succeed. You will be needed soon."

-"... Needed..."

Hearing that word allowed Chikage to calm down at least a little.

(That's right... Even Nogi-san has to maintain pace with everyone in this fight... If I go off and do my own thing... then that makes me no different from that how that girl was before.)

Chikage took a deep breath and answered.

-"It's okay... Iyojima-san. I'm not trying to rush anything... I was just getting tense watching the battle..."

She mustn't forget her role. Once someone tapped out, she would get her chance to bring down the Vertexes herself. She did not want to let the front line heroes' efforts go to waste.

About half an hour had passed.

The first to show signs of fatigue was Wakaba, who had been fighting the brunt of the Vertex horde front and center. Her signs of fatigue were ever so subtle that anyone else would've overlooked them, but none of it slipped past Anzu's eyes.

-"Wakaba-san! You're switching out. Please retreat!"

Once Anzu shouted from the castle walls, while Wakaba was swinging her sword--

-"I can still fi--"

She considered continuing to fight, but reconsidered.

This battle would be long and drawn-out. Buildup of fatigue could spell problems longer down the line. She could not afford to let their teamwork collapse as a result of her own stubbornness and selfishness.

Above all else, Wakaba decided to believe in Anzu's judgment.

-"Okay! Chikage, please take my place!"

-"Leave it to me..."

Her voice came from right behind Wakaba.

Chikage had already mobilized to the city office roof.

-"I... was about to slap some sense into you... if you were going to refuse to switch out..."

-"Well, I've learned from playing co-op video games with you. When it's time to shine, you shine. When it's time to back down, you back down... Right?"

Wakaba lightly held her hand up. Chikage slowly placed her own hand against hers in an awkward high five.

-"I'm counting on you, Chikage."

-"Take... a good rest..."

Wakaba leaped back to Marugame Castle as Chikage stood off against the Vertexes with her large scythe in hand.

-"Now then... Time for a massacre..."



Before Chikage left for the front line, she told Anzu to "support Yuuna as much as you can".

Since Yuuna's weapon was her fists, she had to get into extremely close quarters in order to defeat even one enemy, meaning she was at a disadvantage when it came to fighting swarms of enemies. Relying on Yuuna's strength alone could possibly cause the network of defense to crumble.

Anzu couldn't move from the castle walls, but as long as she had her crossbow, she could support Yuuna from a distance.

So in addition to dealing with Vertexes that escaped the front line, Anzu provided covering fire for Yuuna.

A Vertex tried to snap at Yuuna from behind, but was shot through by Anzu's arrow.

-"Thanks!"

Yuuna shouted as she felled a Vertex in front of her with her fist.

At around the same time, Anzu's voice rang out from the west side.

-"Anzuu!! Keep supporting Yuuna like that! Tama's A-OK by herself over here!"

-"Understood!"

With Anzu's support, Yuuna was able to fight as if the two of them were together, which in theory lightened her burden significantly.

-"Sorry for the trouble! You're such a big help, An-chan!"

Anzu replied wholeheartedly to Yuuna's words.

-"Not at all! Seeing you guys fighting in the front line has given me the courage to fight!!"

(Keep supporting Yuuna, huh... Now that was a real bluff, wasn't it!?)

Tamako thought that as she swung her bladed yo-yo.

Her weapon gave her a wide attack range, making her more suited for fighting groups compared to Yuuna, but considering the sheer number of enemies, that was not much consolation.

But now that she had told Anzu to help Yuuna, she couldn't just let their defense crumble on her side either.

Tamako's bladed yo-yo cut through the air as it felled the surrounding Vertexes.

Back at Marugame Castle's fortified walls, Wakaba rested to prepare for her next deployment.

From the walls, she could see the other heroes fighting.



Tamako boldly swinging around her bladed yo-yo. Yuuna making up for her lack of range with her boundless determination. Chikage taking on the most enemy attacks head-on as her substitute.

Anzu fulfilling the heavy responsibility as the last line of defense in this battle of attrition.

As she watched her friends battle, Wakaba's heart shuddered.

(Look, Nogi Wakaba... Look at how reliable your friends are. They've always been by your side.)

Wakaba stuck her sword down in the earth and gripped its handle.

The time to celebrate would be once the battle had been won.

The Vertexes' numbers were too much for her to allow herself to lower her guard for even a moment.

What Wakaba had to do on standby as she waited to redeploy to the front line was to believe in her friends and rest.

Eventually, Tamako was starting to show signs of fatigue after continuous fighting without Anzu's support.

-"Wakaba-san, please switch with Tamacchi-sempai!"

-"All right!"

Under Anzu's command, Wakaba leaped to where Tamako was.

-"Tamako, we're switching!"

-"Wakaba... did you see that!? Tama kept up the defense here all by herself. Amazing, right!?"

Tamako spoke proudly.

-"Yeah, you were amazing... Leave the rest to me and go take a break."

-"I will... I really am kinda tired."

Tamako stepped back with a wry smile on her face.

Wakaba gave her a high five as she stepped forward.

Immediately afterward, a Vertexes approached with its gigantic white body right before Wakaba's eyes. She drew her sword, and in a gleaming flash, the enemy was cut in two.

Upon seeing that, a smile formed on Tamako's lips.

-"Hey, Wakaba! When you were on standby, it was a real relief to have you right behind Tama. If Tama were to fall, you'd be right there to take care of things, so everything was fine. Even now that we've switched, I can rest assured knowing you've got this."

Strength isn't all about the power to fight.

The ability to give your friends a sense of security simply with your presence at their backs-- That was another sort of strength. That's what Tamako had felt during this battle.

-"There's no way I'd let you fall. Never."

Wakaba answered as she cut down Vertex after Vertex with her sword.

Tamako smiled wryly knowing that Wakaba would say something like that.

-"Haha, true that. Thanks, Wakaba. Welp, I'm counting on you!"

Tamako retreated back to Marugame Castle's fortified walls.

Wakaba shouldered Tamako's trust and continued swinging her sword.

In the heroes' perspective, about three hours had passed since the start of forestization--

They continued to overwhelm the Vertexes without significant injury thanks to their resting in rotation.

However, none of the heroes thought that they would be able to maintain the advantage to the very end.

The enemy had yet to use its full strength. They knew that.

Eventually, there was a shift in the enemies' movements. The Vertexes gathered into one place and fused.

-"Please be careful! They've begun molding into an evolved form!"

Anzu shouted from the castle walls.

It appeared the Vertexes had finally gotten serious.

Dozens, hundreds of Vertexes gathered and fused into a larger entity, taking a form unlike anything they had ever seen. The evolved Vertex took the shape of a giant serpent.

The current front line of heroes consisted of Wakaba at the east, Yuuna at the center, and Chikage at the west.

The serpent Vertex first went to attack Wakaba.

But Wakaba remained calm. She had seen several evolved Vertexes before. She would not lose her composure to them any longer.

Wakaba caught her breath and lay in wait for the enemy to arrive. She took the minimum necessary movement to dodge the tremendous lunge of the colossal body, simultaneously unsheathing her sword. The serpent Vertex's long body was cut in two.



All the heroes were left breathless by the vivid brilliance of the strike.

But Anzu alone noticed-- the sliced serpent was not dead.

-"Wakaba-san! It's still alive!"

At the sound of Anzu's voice, Wakaba jumped back almost entirely by reflex. The sliced serpent had formed into two separate serpents, each coming at Wakaba for a flanking attack. Had her reaction been but a moment delayed, the serpents could have bitten her in two.

Right when Wakaba leaped backwards, she lopped off the head of the left snake in a punishing strike. But even when she sliced off the serpent's head, both the head and the body once again took the form of whole serpents and began to move again. Furthermore, the split-off serpents did not decrease in size: by absorbing the surrounding common Vertexes, the serpents were able to regain the same size as the original.

With the Vertexes now forming three giant serpents, they continued to attack Wakaba.

-"If I keep cutting them, they just keep multiplying, huh...?"

Wakaba readied a dual-wielding stance with her sword in her right hand and her scabbard in her left, keeping the serpent Vertexes in check with scabbard strikes will felling common Vertexes with her sword.

But blunt-force scabbard strikes were unable to deal any sort of damage to the evolved Vertexes. The serpents were likely unstoppable unless enough damage was dealt to their entire body at once.

However, none of the five heroes present had a weapon that could damage the entire body of an enemy of that size.

-"Alrighty... Looks like it's Tama's turn here!"

Tamako stood up after having been resting on the castle walls. Now that the defensive line was threatening to collapse, this was no time to be resting.

Tamako shouted out to Wakaba who was facing the serpent Vertexes.

-"Wakabaa! I'm gonna use a trump card!!"

-"!? Wait, Tamako! In that case--"

-"No, I'm not gonna wait. Not gonna let you say you'll use it instead, either! If Tama doesn't take the spotlight today, there might not be a tamarrow!"

Tamako shut her eyes and felt for the Shinju's power dwelling in her body. She perceived her link to the Shinju and used it as an intermediary to access the Shinju's conceptual records, extracting the power of a "fairy" from within.

Tamako extracted-- Wan'yuudou (輪入道, wheel monk).

Immediately afterwards, Tamako's bladed yo-yo changed form.

-"Huh!? Wait, Tamacchi-sempai, don't you think that's a little too big!?"

Anzu's surprise was no surprise. The bladed yo-yo had become several times the size of Tamako herself.

-"You can't throw it at that size, can you...?"

-"I sure can! I'll throw it using my guts! Just you watch, A~n~zu~~!!"

Tamako gripped the bladed yo-yo with both her hands and wound herself up round and round like she were preparing for a hammer toss. As she spun it around, the bladed yo-yo's wire lengthened, gradually increasing its radius of gyration.

-"Rrrrrrrrrr~ryaahhh!!"

And after building up enough centrifugal force, the gigantic bladed yo-yo flew off of the wire.

-"Wait!? Huh? It tore away from the wire!?"

-"Heh... No worries. That's how you're supposed to use it."

Once thrown, this bladed yo-yo would move in accordance to Tamako's will without the need to operate it with the wire.

The gigantic bladed yo-yo flew towards the serpent Vertexes as its bladed circumference spun with tremendous rotational velocity. The blades were also on fire. The blazing bladed yo-yo passed right beside Wakaba as she continued swinging her sword, and went straight for a serpent Vertex, tearing up its entire body at once. Without relenting, it even caught the torn enemy's body on fire, burning it to a crisp.

Like a living creature with a will of its own, the bladed yo-yo then spun about in the air, tearing into the other two serpents and burning them up.

-"... A-amazing..."

Wakaba stared in wonder at the bladed yo-yo's brutal intensity.

Still standing at the Marugame Castle's fortified walls, Tamako gave Wakaba a thumbs up.

Wakaba smiled and returned the gesture.

(If Tamako's control was off, that could've happened to me too, huh.)

Wakaba smiled wryly in secret.

The power of the bladed yo-yo was indeed incredible, but what was truly superb was Tamako's ability to control it precisely in close proximity to Wakaba which required Tamako to read her movements.

The blazing bladed yo-yo that had swept the serpents in the blink of an eye continued to mercilessly prey upon the other common Vertexes as well.

The Vertexes were unable to counter the wheel of fire and rapidly dwindled in number.



However... not all of the Vertexes were burned up.

"...!"

Suddenly, Tamako collapsed to her knees.

"Tamacchi-sempai!?"

Anzu rushed over and supported her body. Tamako's face started to look slightly pale.

"I-I'm okay... Just a little dizzy, that's all."

"But...!"

From the front lines, Wakaba's voice rang out as well.

"Tamako, are you okay!? The fairies' power must really be too much of a burden on the body!"

"No, Wakaba... I don't think this is the time to be saying that... Look ahead!"

"!?"

Wakaba shifted her attention to the group of Vertexes ahead--

The Vertexes that had been trampled down by Tamako's blazing bladed yo-yo began to gather once again. They began to fuse in far greater numbers than when they had formed the serpent.

"It's huge...!"

The Vertexes had taken a form that towered over even Wakaba as she stood on top of a rooftop. It was perhaps as big, or perhaps even bigger than Marugame Castle.

Perhaps they had taken such a gigantic form in order to make themselves impervious to even Tamako's use of Wan'yuudou's power.

Nearly all of the Vertexes that invaded Shikoku were conglomerating into a single unit, meaning even the enemy had decided to go all-in.

"Wakaba-chan! At that size, there's nothing we can do!"

Even as she heard Yuuna panicking, Wakaba calmly observed the Vertex's movements.

Careful observation of the enemy is essential to martial arts.

Having trained her body with that mentality since she was young, Wakaba never forgot to observe the enemy even in such an urgent emergency situation.

(If you form such a huge body so hastily, there has to be a weak seam somewhere...)

The movement of the gathering common Vertexes--

The balance of the whole gigantic body as it forms--

(... Got it.)

Wakaba found several weak spots in the forming gigantic body. She shouted out to the other heroes.

-"It's still got several weak spots in its body! If we hit it there before it finishes forming, we might be able to defeat it!"

-"Weak spots? But...!"

Yuuna had probably seen the enemy's weak spots as well. But it was the core of hundreds or thousands of Vertexes gathered together. She couldn't even approach it.

-"With Wan'yuudou... Tama can do it!"

Tamako jumped onto the bladed yo-yo that had returned to her nearby. If she used the bladed yo-yo imbued with Wan'yuudou's power, she could defeat common Vertexes while approaching the fusing gigantic body.

Tamako began to take off on her bladed yo-yo towards the gigantic Vertex body--

-"Tamacchi-sempai, I'll go too!"

--when Anzu jumped on board too.

Anzu had been fulfilling the commander role from Marugame Castle's fortified walls, but now that the battle had culminated into the final clash, both Vertex and Hero sides were at an all-out offensive. Thus, she had concluded that it was time for her to join the front line as well.

Anzu wasn't the only one who jumped on board Tamako's bladed yo-yo.

-"Tama-chan, An-chan, I can't just let you two go off into danger by yourselves!"

-"Agreed. I'll join you."

Yuuna and Wakaba.

-"That giant one... is mine."

And even Chikage.

All the heroes boarded the bladed yo-yo.

Tamako stared blankly at all her friends who had gotten onto her bladed yo-yo-- but eventually, she smiled.

-"Okay, then I guess we're all going then!"

The forming giant Vertex began shooting cannonball-shaped objects out of its abdomen to hinder the heroes' approach.

Tamako expertly flew the bladed yo-yo and dodged them all. She was nearing the limits of fatigue, but Tamako held her consciousness together through sheer force of will.



(Thanks... Yuuna. Tamako. Anzu. Chikage.)

Wakaba silently thanked the girls for being there.

To have her friends at her side, fighting alongside her. Just how much reassuring was that to Wakaba?

The giant Vertex had several weak spots. It would probably be difficult for Wakaba to destroy them all by herself.

But-- with her friends by her side, it was possible.

"Tamako, take the one straight ahead! Anzu, take the upper right one at 2 o'clock! Yuuna, take the lower one at 5 o'clock! Chikage, take the lower left one! I'll strike the top!"

Once Wakaba and Yuuna explained to the other three generally where the weak spots were, they were able to find all of the enemy's weak spots.

"Let's go!"

At the signal of Wakaba's voice, the four of them jumped off the bladed yo-yo while Tamako remained on-board. They each struck their assigned weak spot.

But--

As if the Vertexes had anticipated the attack, several common Vertexes gathered to protect the weak spots and surrounded the heroes. Not only could the heroes not attack the weak spots, but now they were open to a focused assault.

(Crap...!)

Wakaba began to panic at that situation. The tables were turned.

She let her friends fall into a trap and the gigantic Vertex was reaching complete fusion.

(There's-- no time to hesitate!)

To protect her friends.

To prevent any of the land's citizens from getting hurt.

Wakaba would now use a trump card.

She accessed the Shinju's conceptual records and extracted the power of a fairy-- and the the next moment, Wakaba's body was imbued with a new power.

"Whoooaaa!!"

Wakaba kicked back a common Vertex that had flown nearby, pushing her into another common Vertex which she kicked off of as well. With repeated use of Vertexes as footstools, the normally flightless hero was able to move through the air at tremendous speed.

At one point in time, Yoshitsune repeatedly leaped between boats floating in the ocean in fluid motions that made him appear to fly.

This technique is called hassou tobi (八艘飛び, eight boat leap).

The hassou tobi now bestowed Wakaba with incredible mobility through the air, allowing for her to quickly rush towards her friends in danger. Wakaba flew through the air as if gravity were nonexistent. She cut down the common Vertexes surrounding the other heroes one by one. With each use of the hassou tobi, her speed rose and rose. She had surpassed even the limit of which an ordinary person could follow her with their eyes.

With Wakaba's hassou tobi and sword slashes, the numbers of common Vertexes hindering the heroes dwindled in the twinkle of an eye.

"Thanks, Wakaba, we can work with this!"

"I'll shoot it down!"

"Here we go-- Hero PUNCH!"

"No more... obstructions..."

As Wakaba felled the obstructing common Vertexes, the four heroes attacked the giant's weak spots in quick succession... and destroyed them all.

The evolving Vertex tore at the seams, its large build collapsing as it let out a bizarre shriek and began to vanish.

As they watched the giant Vertex vanish, Wakaba fell straight down through the sky.

(My body... won't move...)

She was probably suffering from the recoil of using a trump card.

"Wakaba-chaaaaaan!!"

As she fell, Wakaba felt like she heard Yuuna's voice ringing in her ears.

And then--

The intense conflict that would later be called the "Battle of Marugame Castle" was all but decided. The evolved Vertex of unprecedented size was destroyed in the process of its formation.

Since most of the invading Vertexes had been used for the purpose of fusion, the remaining four heroes were easily able to sweep up what little remained of the common Vertexes.



Forestization lifted and Shikoku's normal scenery returned.

In the grounds around Marugame Castle, planted with sakura trees, Hinata walked with a brisk pace.

her eyes darted around the area as if she were looking for something.

Marugame Castle is famous for its sakura, and even the trees withered now are sure bear many flowers in the spring.

Underneath one of the sakura trees, a single girl had collapsed.

"I finally found you... Please wake up, Wakaba-chan."

Hinata called out to the girl.

She opened her eyes.

"Hina... ta...?"

Wakaba's hero outfit had disappeared and she returned to her ordinary uniform.

Hinata smiled.

"Thank goodness you're okay, Wakaba-chan..."

The Shinju's oracle had told her that Wakaba was alive and that she was within the Marugame Castle grounds, which was why Hinata had been searching for her.

Without getting up, Wakaba questioned Hinata with a hollow expression on her face.

"Is it... over...?"

"Yes. We won. Thanks to you and all the other heroes, humanity has been saved. With zero hero casualties... Everyone's safe."

"I see..."

Wakaba smiled and got up.

"... I had a little dream."

Wakaba was in elementary school in the dream.

The classmates who had been killed on the day of the Vertex attacks were standing before her. Wakaba spoke up to them. "The Vertexes aren't the only ones who need to pay for their actions... I need to pay for my sin, my failure to protect you and surviving on my own."

But they shook their heads and smiled at Wakaba.



"You see, our families are in Shikoku."

-"Thanks to your brave fight, our parents are still alive"

-"So you've already paid."

Braving the dangers of fighting the Vertex and protecting the land and its people-- That was how Wakaba was paying for her sin of failing to protect her friends.

Wakaba held back tears as she tried her best to smile.

-"In that case... I'll keep... I'll keep protecting the people who live in this land forever. That's my reward. A reward for everything... That's the Nogi way."

-"What kind of dream?"

Hinata gently asked.

Wakaba stood up and answered with a refreshed look on her face.

-"A gentle... yet grave... kind of dream."

At that moment, they heard a certain familiar, boisterous voice.

-"Ah, there she is!"

-"Thank goodness she's okay!"

-"That girl... wouldn't die that easily, you know..."

-"Wakaba-chan! We won!"

Wakaba turned around to see her friends running up to her.

(Chapter 9 END)

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME TEN!!

10

NOVEL



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい　イラスト：BUNBUN　監修：Project 2H

ガーリッシュナンバー

著：渡航
キャラクター原案・原絵：QP:flapper
挿絵：やむ茶

ウルトラ怪獣擬人化計画

設定・原案・シリーズ構成：海法紀光
執筆：森瀬繚　イラスト：ハル犬
原作・監修：円谷プロダクション

アウトロー・ワンダーランド

原案：田中ロミオ　著：波摘
カラーイラスト：saitom
挿絵：大岩ケンジ

［ DENGEKI G's NOVEL ］ 電撃G's magazine 2016年6月号付録② 分売不可

TAISHA RECORD DEPARTMENT • MIKO-SAMA

CENSORED

We're all going on a trip.

Basically like a school field trip for a "Hero Club" or something.

I pray this'll be a fun trip.

I pray nothing bad will happen.

I pray we'll find survivors.

It's been decided that our route will avoid  Peninsula.

Hero Record Mar 2019 AD

Iyojima Anzu's Record

vol.10

Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JWWORKS
Supervision by Project 2H

第十話 ―根雪―



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JWWORKS
監修／Project 2H

©2014 Project 2H



The five heroes, led by Wakaba, and the miko Hinata stood within the Seto Ohashi Bridge Memorial Park.

The heroes were in their transformed state which they used to fight Vertexes. Hinata was wearing her miko garb as well. In their bags were items like food, camping gear, spare clothes, medical supplies, as well as tools to collect soil and water survey samples.

-"Man, it's been years since we've been outside Shikoku, huh?"

Tamako's tone and expression were like those of a child excited to go on a field trip.

-"I had moved in from Honshu when the Vertexes attacked, so it's been about three years for me!"

-"I have never gone very far from home, so this is my first time leaving Shikoku."

-"Me... too..."

-"It's been about four years for Tama~. The last time was when my family went to Hiroshima."

Everyone spoke excitedly.

It had been decided that Wakaba and the others would go outside the barrier on an investigation expedition.

They would leave and visit Suwa, which Shiratori had been protecting, as well as the north where possibilities of human life had been found. Since moving by helicopter or ship had the possibility of attracting Vertex attention, they could only go by foot.

While that would be no problem for the heroes, Hinata only had the physical ability of an ordinary human. Thus, the heroes would have to carry her.

-"I'm sorry, everyone."

Yuuna cheerfully responded to the apologetic Hinata.

-"Don't worry about it, Hina-chan! You're always doing miko work that the rest of us can't do!"

-"Thank you, Yuuna-san."

Hinata smiled at Yuuna's words.

-"Then let's play rock paper scissors to see who'll carry Hinata first, why don't--"

Before Tamako could finish, Wakaba slipped past her and lifted Hinata in her arms.

-"Okay, let's go."

Other four: "..."

For a second, the other heroes were taken aback at how Wakaba had simply picked Hinata up as if it were only the natural thing to do.

-"Wow, not only are you carrying her, but you're giving her a princess carry..."

-"I'm getting embarrassed just looking at you!"

Anzu and Tamako blushed.

-"...? Did I do something weird?"

Wakaba looked around quizzically, not understanding the meaning behind everyone's reactions.

-"Well... if you don't find anything strange about it, then I guess it's fine..."

-"You're like a princess and a prince!"

Chikage wore an expression of blank amazement while Yuuna's eyes shone in admiration.

-"Then let's carry Wakaba-chan's baggage for her!"

-"Good idea!"

The others heroes split Wakaba's bags amongst themselves.

-"Awwrighty then! Heroes~ onward~!"

At the signal of Yuuna's enthusiastic cheer, the girls leapt from the memorial park, heading through Seto Ohashi Bridge toward Honshu.

As they moved onwards, Wakaba thought back to what had happened since the day of the Vertex general offensive--

After the large-scale invasion in February, a miko's oracle revealed that Shikoku's would enjoy peace for a short while. The Taisha assumed that the general offensive had cost the Vertex side of a majority of their firepower as well.

Now that the enemy attacks had calmed down, it would now even be possible for the heroes to leave Shikoku. Thus, the Taisha began considering the possibility of investigating regions outside of Shikoku. Another great factor was how possibilities of human life had been found in the northern land and the southwest islands.

In regards to performing investigation duties, they conducted experiments on a small island in the Seto Inland Sea outside the barrier and confirmed several facts.

First, hero power could be used outside the barrier without any abnormalities.

Second, the atmosphere outside the barrier was sufficiently clean. There had been rumors that the air outside the barrier was contaminated with Vertex toxins or viruses, but those had been found to be completely false.

In fact, the atmosphere had improved compared to how it was before the Vertexes' appearance in 2015.

Third, using correspondence intertwined with the power of the gods, the heroes would be able to contact Shikoku even from a distance. This was the same technology once used to communicate between Shikoku and Suwa.

Thanks to these experimental results, the Taisha deemed it was now possible for the heroes to leave the barrier and investigate.

Furthermore, as a precaution, they decided that as a miko, Hinata would accompany them to receive any oracles from the Shinju.

The details of their duty was to investigate the state of the environment outside Shikoku as well as to check if there were any areas with human survivors. The areas to check for survivors were to be Suwa, the northern lands, and cities. They would also take samples for soil and water surveys in all regions. There were many tasks to accomplish.



Wakaba and the others crossed the bridge over the Seto Inland Sea.

Though they had their duty, their previous victory and the repose of Vertex activity had the heroes in high spirits.

-"Good thing Tama-chan had so many outdoor goods, huh!"

-"Heheh, if you need a fire started, or some rice cooked, or anything else, just leave it up 'ta mah outdoorsman skills."

Tamako pridefully responded to Yuuna's admiration.

During the expedition, the girls would be on their own to secure campsites and prepare food. Thanks to Tamako's hobbies, she had an abundance of knowledge for outdoor living. Tamako had prepared all of the tools they would need for the expedition.

-"I never expected Tamacchi-sempai's outdoor hobbies would prove useful..."

-"Life... is full of surprises..."

-"What's life gotta do with it!? You're mocking Tama, aren't you!?"

Tamako, Anzu, Yuuna, and Chikage shared a lively conversation as they continued.

Meanwhile, Wakaba paid full attention to Hinata as she carried her.

-"You're not scared, are you, Hinata?"

Heroes moved faster than cars while leaping.

Wakaba and the others were already used to the speed, but the experience was probably like an extended roller coaster ride for Hinata.

-"Not at all. After all, you wouldn't drop me, would you, Wakaba-chan?"

-"... Of course not."

Wakaba replied reassuringly.

But at the end of the Seto Ohashi Bridge, once Okayama came into view, a shadow was cast on the girls' enjoyment of their field trip.

The industrial district of Kurashiki City's coast was already ruined beyond recognition.

Many buildings had been blown out from the inside as if a chemical explosion had occurred within, and traces of heat-deformation could be seen.

Wakaba and the others descended to the cruel sight of the factories.

-"How terrible..."

Tamako looked around with a stern expression on her face.

Were the things build by human hands nothing more than object to be trampled in the eyes of the Vertexes?

Hinata got down from Wakaba's shoulders and took photos of the industrial area's state with a digital camera to report to the Taisha.

-"Just to make sure... let's check the area for any survivors."

Wakaba spoke with a leaden tone.

The girls searched from the coastal industrial district all the way to Kurashiki's most populous area in the fields. They leapt to get a birds eye view and walked around the surface looking for any human presence.

-"Kurashiki was famous as a town with old-era sights... For it to be reduced to this..."

Anzu sadly murmured.

The once beautiful townscape had completely changed.

The fact that they hadn't seen any Vertexes either perhaps meant that the Taisha's prediction was true about the Vertexes' numbers currently being lowered.

Once the heroes had reached Kurashiki Station, they all had heavy looks on their faces.

However-- they had no time to wallow in depression.

-"Let's go. We've still got a long ways to go."

Wakaba lifted Hinata in her arms once more.

Afterwards, they girls followed their planned route and started heading east.

They passed through Okayama and into Hyogo prefecture.

-"Wakaba-chan. Do you want to switch with someone to carry Hina-chan?"

Yuuna asked, having noticed that Wakaba had been carrying Hinata all the way since they had left Shikoku.

-"Thanks. But I'm fine. The rest of you are carrying my baggage, so I'm not that tired."

-"So you're saying I only weigh as much as one share of baggage, huh?"

-"No, that's not what I meant..."

-"That's where you're supposed to agree with her, Wakaba-chan!"

As they had that exchange, they reached Kobe.

The girls landed on the roof of a building that just barely managed to maintain its shape. There, they had an unbroken view of all of Kobe.

Now not even the large city of Kobe retained a trace of its former glory.

Buildings, residences, and roads were mostly all destroyed, and even the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge connecting Kobe to Awaji Island had collapsed.

-"How about we split up into two groups to search this time?"



Wakaba suggested. It increased the risk of running into any Vertexes, but since they didn't have unlimited time for their investigation expedition, it was a way to save time.

All 6: "Let's split up into rock and paper! Hoi!"

Splitting up into rock and paper groups led to one group consisting of Wakaba, Hinata, and Chikage, with the other group consisting of Yuuna, Tamako, and Anzu. Before parting ways, they settled on regrouping by the ferry station in Kobe Harbor in three hours.

Wakaba's group walked upon the abandoned streets searching for survivors.

Rubble from collapsed buildings and toppled vehicles littered the streets, making it a hassle to walk around.

Just how many lives were lost here?

-"You wouldn't suppose there are any survivors here, would you...?"

Hinata murmured.

-"This place must've been totally wiped out too... I'm sure..."

Chikage has said little since they had seen the sight of Kurashiki, but spoke now. Her tone was tinged with helplessness and anger.

-"We still don't know for sure. There's still the possibility that people took refuge somewhere."

Chikage glanced at Wakaba, as if to tell her not to offer empty words of consolation.

Just then, Hinata's voice rang out.

-"Wakaba-chan! Chikage-san! Look at that...!"

In the shade of the rubble was the giant white body of a monster-- several monsters. Squirming Vertexes.

Wakaba grasped her sword's handle and stepped forward to protect Hinata.

But before she could do anything, Chikage raised her scythe overhead and leapt at the Vertexes.

-"You... bastards...!"

Swinging her scythe with unabashed rage, Chikage shredded Vertex after Vertex.

-"Chikage..."

Wakaba could was left speechless in the bloodcurdling sight of Chikage's rampage. Hinata was the same.

Eventually, after she had slain all the Vertexes, Chikage murmured.

-"Let's go... We're looking for survivors, aren't we...?"

Chikage walked with her head cast down, the look on her face invisible to Wakaba.

After the three hours were up, Wakaba's trio arrived at the meeting place by the ferry station. In the end, they found not a single, human survivor. Only Vertexes. They were easy to defeat since they weren't in large groups, but it still felt like an empty victory.

The sun began to set without any of them feeling like saying anything as they looked over the sea. The boats by the coast had perhaps all fallen victim to Vertex attacks, as whatever boats were there were either had their hulls cut in half or were slanted and half-sunken.

-"Wakaba-chaan! Gun-chan! Hina-chaan!"

Wakaba turned around at the sound of that voice behind them to see Yuuna running their way. Tamako and Anzu were with her. But their faces were devoid of light.

-"We didn't find any survivors, though we did encounter several Vertexes... What about your group, Wakaba-san?"

Wakaba shook her head at the question Anzu sullenly asked.

-"Same here. Besides, if there are Vertexes still lurking around here, then it's hard to believe that any humans could be left, huh..."

Wakaba looked at the desolated Kobe.

Everyone else fell silent as they joined her.

Eventually the silence was broken by Tamako. She spoke with a bright voice as if in an attempt to dispel the dark mode.

-"Welp, the sun's set, so I guess we better go and choose a campsite soon!"

Perhaps picking up on Tamako's intention, Anzu likewise spoke cheerfully.

-"That's true! I am hungry too!"

After seeing those two, Wakaba tried to shake off the dark mood as well.

(As leader, I need to stay on the ball.)

Wakaba looked around in search of a building that looked suitable for lodging in.

-"If only we could find a building that's still intact..."

-"Mmm, they all look like they're in shambles, ready to collapse..."

Yuuna looked around as well, but couldn't find any suitable building.

But then Tamako spoke up.

-"Tama-time out, guys! If we're gonna camp, it's gotta be somewhere with clean water. We didn't bring that much water with us after all."

To bring enough water for the entire investigation expedition, they'd be overburdened with baggage, so they would have to find water on-site. Since almost all the infrastructure had been destroyed, they couldn't use the water lines, meaning a clean riverside would probably make a better campsite than a city. They did have a portable water filter in their baggage, but it was only a simple device so they couldn't put too much trust in it.

Tamako crossed her arms and thought as she spoke.

-"Also, we should gather firewood. After all, we need a fire to cook food! Which means..."



-"We gotta camp outdoors!"

Led by Tamako, the heroes went to some campgrounds near Mount Rokko. The sun had already set so it was getting dark.

-"Wait, Tamacchi-sempai, are you sure you didn't just want to camp outdoors...?"

Anzu sent a piercing glance.

-"O-of course not! C'mon, this way we can easily secure a water source! There's even plenty of wood to start a fire, too!"

A river flowed close to the campgrounds. Since they were in the mountains, they would probably have no difficulty gathering firewood. Tamako was indeed correct.

Just to be on the safe side, they inspected everywhere around the campgrounds for any survivors or usable equipment.

They found a lodge and other facilities wrecked perhaps by a Vertex attack. They found no survivors. In regards to equipment, Hinata found a camping tent inside a warehouse.

-"Great! Now it's really starting to feel like a camp out!"

Tamako spoke with shining eyes.

-"I knew it, Tamako-san just really wanted to camp out..."

-"Th-th-th-that's not true, Hinata! C'mon, it's just important to set the mood, you know!?"

The girls all cooperated to pitch the tent, gather firewood and start a fire.

For dinner, they were boiling water in a pot to cook some udon they had brought from Shikoku. It was a dry-noodle type of Sanuki udon that kept well.

-"Time for Tama to show off!"

Tamako spoke happily as she put the pot to the fire.

Pitching a tent and starting a fire may seem like simple tasks, but they are difficult without some prior knowledge. If not for Tamako's advice, they probably would've been unable to perform either task.

-"You're really look sempai-like, Tamacchi-sempai..."

-"And what exactly is that~ supposed to mean, A~n~zu~? Tama's always sempai-like, right!?"

-"Ow, ow! Please don't grind on my head like that!"

The water you use in preparing delicious udon is important. A water quality test of the river by the campgrounds revealed that the water was sufficiently clean.

The six girls gathered around the fire as they ate the fully-cocked udon.

-"Yup, it's delicious! Udon's really great when we eat it together!"

Yuuna spoke cheerfully after eating a bite.

-"You're right. We saw nothing but horrific sights today... but it sure is relaxing to be with you all eating udon like this."

Wakaba could feel the tension of the day fade from her body.

Today they saw something they had never seen in Shikoku-- A world of unprecedented destruction. But the time they spent eating udon together was no different than when they were in Shikoku-- somethign ordinary, yet precious for Wakaba.

-"Wakaba-chan, you look too serious."

-"That's right."

Hinata and Anzu smiled wryly, but spoke gently.

-"It's only the first day! Tomorrow we're going to Osaka, and even further away after that. I'm sure there's gotta be at least one safe region!"

Wakaba nodded at Tamako's words.

Chikage-- silently looked up to the night sky as she ate udon.

After dinner, everyone went into the river to wash off their sweat.

They decided to set up a lookout just in case of the possibility of a Vertex attack. Chikage took the post while the other five entered the river.

-"Oohh, it's so cold! It'd be more fun if it were summer, huh... We could have a splash battle or something!"

Amd with that, Tamako splashed water at Yuuna.

-"Uwah! What was that for, Tama-chan!?"

-"Come at me, Yuuna! We can make it a fun summer camp in spirit at least!"

-"Awwrighty, gotcha! I won't hold back in that case!"

Tamako and Yuuna started their splash battle under the night sky of the early spring.

While the two lively ones started playing, the more moderate Wakaba, Anzu, and Hinata simply stood still as they soaked in the water.

-"When soaking in cold water, it's best to stay still... If you move too much, it'll sap you of your body heat."

-"Yes, that's entirely true..."

-"Moving around in cold water is like leaping into the middle of a shootout when--"

-"Uryaaahh!"

Before Anzu could finish, Tamako relentlessly splashed water at the three of them.





-"Hyaaah!"

Anzu's shriek resounded in the darkness of the night.

-"Mmgh, surprise attacks are a coward's move, Tamako-san!"

Hinata turned to face Tamako.

-"Shut up! It doesn't matter if you move around or stay still! Cold water's gonna be cold! So join us, you guys!"

-"Yeah, yeah! Let's all have fun together!"

Yuuna joined Tamako and kept the splashes coming.

-"Khh, then I won't go easy on you either!"

Wakaba prepared for war.

In the end, all five fo them participated in the splash battle.

Yuuna called out to Chikage, who was standing by the river all by herself, spacing out as she looked at the night sky.

-"Gun-chan, it's about time we switched lookout!"

-"Yes... okay."

Chikage answered in a somehow unenthusiastic voice.

-"Chikage, you going to join in the water games!?"

Tamako called out in a bright voice.

-"I'll... pass."

Chikage answered coldly.

As Yuuna took up her post, she watched with concern as Chikage sadly entered the water.

After they finished bathing, they went inside the tent to sleep. They would be traveling long distances early the next morning, so they needed as much rest as they could get.

But they still needed to keep a look out, so they decided to take turns staying up in pairs. Currently, Yuuna and Hinata were keeping watch by the fire in front of the tent.

-"Hwaah... Today was Kobe, tomorrow's Osaka, huh. We've got a long ways ahead of us, huh."

Hinata smiled as she watched Yuuna speak with a yawn.

-"That's right. After that, we're going to Tokyo, Suwa, and further north..."

Contact with Suwa ceased last year, but it was still one of the cities with a high possibility of human survival.

After they had checked Suwa's state, they would head further north.

-"You're amazing, Hina-chan. You're not a hero, so you don't normally fight Vertexes, yet you weren't scared at all."

-"I would be lying if I said I wasn't afraid at all, but it's all because you all are with me."

-"That courage is hero-grade!"

-"Heheh, thank you."

Hinata suddenly thought of a question to ask.

-"Now that you mention it, Yuuna-san... is there some sort of motive that keeps you fighting as a hero?"

As a miko who had something of a role to discover heroes, Hinata was mindful of the heroes' human relations and emotional states.

Their strength and physical ability far outpaced that of humans, but inside, they were no more than middle school girls. They had many frailties and insecurities about them. But among all the heroes, Yuuna was always cheerful and fought without hesitation. Since it is impossible to know everything that goes on in someone's mind, that cheerfulness could've been nothing but false bravado for all Hinata knew, but there was something noteworthy about Yuuna's mental strength nonetheless.

How exactly did she feel about fighting as a hero? Hinata had been wondering about that for a while.

-"Mmm, a motive, huh? I never really thought about it, but--"

Yuuna crossed her arms and tilted her head to the side before smiling.

-"If I become a hero and do my best fighting the Vertexes, I can save people. If we keep saving people, then we can slowly but surely take back the world and bring it back to normal. At least that's what I think!"

After hearing those words, Hinata felt like she could understand what went on in Yuuna's mind at least a little.

She's probably a believer.

A believer of human power.

Of hope for the future.

Perhaps that unshakable feeling is what creates mental strength for her.

Yuuna stood up and looked up to the night sky.

-"No, actually, it's more simple than that! 'Heroes' are kinda cool, don't you think? That's my number one reason to fight. Probably!"

A carefree smile rose upon Yuuna's face.

Being with Yuuna mysteriously made Hinata feel cheerful too.

At that moment, something unlike the wind made a rustling noise among the tree leaves.

Both: "!?"

Yuuna and Hinata looked around. They could hear the sound of tree trunks creaking in the forest.

The two quickly realized what was making the sound.

-"Everyone, wake up!! The Vertexes are coming!"

When Hinata rose her voice, the four girls sleeping in the tent came out with their hero weapons in hand.

-"What is it? A merlion?"

-"Not even close, Tamacchi-sempai! Wake up!"

Anzu shook Tamako awake when she realized Tamako was half asleep with her head swaying.

-"The enemy..."

Chikage was fully conscious, but her eyes were red. Her tone of voice also sounded somewhat tired.

Perhaps she hadn't fallen asleep yet.

-"No time to rest, huh..."

As Wakaba said that, she took out her smartphone and transformed into hero form.

Immediately afterwards-- gigantic white monsters appeared as they creaked through the trees in the forest.

Around 10 or so Vertexes had appeared. No match for the heroes now.

After the heroes had annihilated the Vertexes, they decided to resume moving for the day. Now that their location had been sniffed out once, there was the possibility that other Vertexes could approach, so they could not stay put. Furthermore now that the morning had dawned, they decided it was better to move than to rest.

The heroes flew through the cool dawn air. Their next destination after Kobe was Osaka.

-Oh right, I heard there was a big underground mall by Ueda Station in Osaka. You wouldn't have to worry about rain and wind there, so it's like a shelter. Perhaps people have taken refuge there."

Wakaba nodded at Anzu's words.

-"You're right... Since it's underground, they could blockade the entrance so that Vertexes can't invade. It might be safer than the surface. How about we head there?"

Hinata, Yuuna, Tamako, and Chikage agreed and so they headed to Umeda.

They did a thorough search of places where humans could've possibly survived-- for that was all they could do.

Osaka Station and Umeda Station are connected by an underground mall. Several rails pass through these two stations, and thus the underground mall has a complex structure.



Tracing the Hankyu Kobe Main Line's railway, the girls arrived at Sumeda Station from Kobe. They got down beside a crumbled overhead structure.

Like Okayama and Kobe, Osaka had already been destroyed.

-"Aaaahhh!?"

Suddenly, Anzu shrieked.

Thinking that Vertexes had appeared, Wakaba and the others readied themselves and looked around-- only to find no enemy.

-"What's wrong, Anzu?"

When Tamako asked, the pale-faced Anzu pointed underneath the overhead structure. Several shops had perhaps once been lined up there, but now there was nothing left but ruins.

-"Th... there was supposed to be an Osaka-famous rare book store here! How terrible! The last copies of incredibly precious books could be lost to the world now!"

Anzu's body shook as she spoke tearfully.

-"Oh, don't surprise me like that. Who cares about some dumb old books?"

-"You don't understand, Tamacchi-sempai! Books are the crystalization of human knowledge! The Vertexes have crossed the line...!"

Yuuna tried calming down the indignant Anzu by telling her that "It'll be okay, I'm sure all the precious books were taken into Shikoku!". It was quite an odd sight.

Wakaba smiled wryly as she watched them.

If we can have such enthusiastic reactions, that means we're still okay-- Wakaba thought.

The area around the station was cruely destroyed as well, but the stairs to the underground tunnel remained intact.

The stairway was littered with not just rubble, but shelves and tables that had probably been used in stores. Perhaps they were traces of a barricade that had been made. However, even that supposed barricade had been destroyed.

-"..."

Wakaba furrowed her brow at the sight.

It was probably Vertexes that had destroyed the barricade. Though an underground area would be easy to fortify-- it would be an inescapable death trap should any Vertex invasion succeed even once. All that would await them would be a scene from hell.

The other five were probably thinking the same thing. They stopped in front of the entrance with clouded expressions on their faces.

"-- No, we won't know anything unless we check."

Wakaba turned to the staircase and stepped forward.



Silence and cold air ruled the underground. Since there was no longer any electricity running, darkness was just a few steps away from the entrance. The girls lit the way with the pocket lights they brought.

The underground mall was closer to its original state compared to the surface, but stairways and elevators were broken, floors and walls were cracked, definitely signs pointing to a Vertex attack.

They took a smartphone picture of the underground mall map placed by the entrance and walked while inspecting it.

-"Anybody there-- !!?"

As they walked through the passages, Wakaba would call out, but heard nothing in reply but echoes.

-"At the very least, there are traces that people were here..."

Hinata murmured as she looked at a trash can placed in the underground mall. The trash can was stuffed with empty tin cans, plastic bottles, and bento boxes. Everything that couldn't fit was scattered on the floor. Most of the trash looked fairly old, but it established that meals had been had here at one point.

As they walked, they would come across lowered fire prevention shutters and improvised barricades. The people here probably put up a desperate defense against the Vertexes. However, the shutters and barricades were all destroyed now.

They had been wandering the underground mall for about have an hour when they reached a circular plaza of some sort.

-"Wh... what is this!?"

Tamako raised her voice in surprise.

In the center of the plaza was some sort of fountain, but as expected, there was no longer any water flowing out.

Instead-- they found a heap of several skeletons.

Anzu shrieked.

Hinata sank on the spot, perhaps sapped of strength out of shock.

The other four stood stock still at the sight of the skeleton stockpile.

-"... Terrible... the surface is in shambles... and underground, this..."

Chikage muttered in what sounded like a groan.

Wakaba approached the fountain. The heap of skeletons was like a layer of snow on a winter night.

Just how many bodies were left here?

Dozens? No, over a hundred?

Wakaba noticed a notebook on the floor. She picked it up and looked inside. It was the diary of someone who took refuge in this underground mall.



-"...khh...!"

As Wakaba turned the pages to read, her hands trembled with helplessness and rage.

(Chapter 10 END)

白鳥歌野は勇者である

—特別書きおろし番外編—

Shiratori Utano wa YUSHA de aru



No matter what hardships may come our way,

humanity will always get back on its feet--

Those words were a pillar of support.

That was why she was always looking ahead.

Why she always smiled brightly.

She was the most radiant thing

in this closed, illogical world.

A piercing blue sky spread out overhead.

The summer sunlight relentlessly poured out across the vast land.

Fujimori Mito watched from the side of the field as her friend, Shiratori Utano swung a hoe. Several adults around Utano were similarly swinging hoes, plowing the field. Everyone was facing the crop-cultivating land as they sweat.

They were in the plain by the foot of Nagano prefecture's Mt. Moriya.

Utano and the adults were cultivating the field to raise vegetables.

"Let's take a break, everyone!"

At Utano's sign, the surrounding adults paused their work and wiped their sweat. They took shelter under the shade of trees as they made idle chatter like "I hope this year's crops turn out well" or "If only we had commercial farming equipment" and "Be thankful for what we've got". Nagano was known for being a summer resort, so while it may have had the image of being a cool, refreshing area, it was in truth not much different from the rest of Japan in terms of heat or sun. Agricultural work there in the dead of summer ran the risk of heatstroke if you weren't careful.

(I really wouldn't be able to do that, huh...)

Mito smiled wryly. plowing a field did require some strength, so it was hard work for a middle school girl. Utano was a strange one to be enjoying it.

(There's that whole divine protection of the hero thing going on, but above all else, Utanon loves farming.)

As Mito had such thoughts, she was poked in the cheek by some sort of cylindrical object.

"Ow, ow, the spines hurt. Stop poking me with that cucumber, Utanon."

"But it's nice and cool, isn't it?"

When Mito turned around, she saw Utano holding a cucumber. She was carrying a basket filled with cucumbers and tomatoes. Probably today's harvest.



"The crop's delicious again this year. It's great that we can make other vegetables too."

Utano took out a kitchen knife and rubbed the back of it against the cucumber to remove the spines. She then snapped it in two and took a bite out of one half.

"Mmm, tastes good! Try some, Mii-chan!"

Utano held out the other half of the cucumber to Mito. Mito took the cucumber half and bit into it with her small mouth. The pleasant coolness and freshness characteristic of summer vegetables spread throughout her mouth.

"Yummy"

"I know, right!?"

Utano smiled happily. Seeing that bright face made Mito happy as well.

Mito swallowed what was in her mouth before speaking.

"Utanon, you really love tinkering with the field, don't you?"

"Well, I'm gonna be a farm king after all!"

"A farm king... sounds kinda cool."

"But even better than a farm king is a farm emperor, and better than that is a farm god. The path of farming is deep and endless..."

Utano spoke with a somehow far-looking gaze.

"Ahahah, how does the farming hierarchy in your head work, Utanon? Anyway, you're pretty good for someone not from a family with a farming background."

"And yet I fell in love with farm work... It was destiny. Mii-chan, if you tried plowing with me, I'm sure you'd understand the wonders of farming."

"No thanks. I'm not good with insects."

"I see... Too bad."

Despite her dejected word, Utano didn't seem particularly disappointed in the slightest as she continued to nibble on her cucumber.

(But I do like watching you work the fields, Utanon.)

Mito poured some barley tea from a canteen into a paper cup and handed it to Utano.

"Thanks."

Utano drank the tea from the cup as she watched the adults resting in the shade. Fieldwork in the dead of summer was tiring, yet everyone had a look of fulfillment on their faces.

"Seems like everyone's starting to have bright looks on their faces."

Mito nodded at Utano's elated words.

They weren't always this positive, though.

Mito thought back to that day-- three years prior, when those monsters appeared in the sky, and everything that happened since...

End of July, 2015

All sorts of natural disasters like earthquakes and floods broke out, throwing Japan into chaos.

As the final blow, the Vertexes appeared and relentlessly killed people, sending humanity into an abyss of despair.

Right after the Vertexes appeared in Nagano, a barrier was formed in the area around Lake Suwa, within which no damage took place. However, those unlucky enough to be outside the barrier were unable to escape, and many lost their lives.

Amidst the chaos, one awoke as a hero: Shiratori Utano. Without regards to her own safety, she left the barrier and fought the Vertexes, saving many people.

That was when she met Mito. In the midst of the people rushing into the safety of the barrier, Mito saw Utano fighting the monsters.

Afterwards, Utano and Mito were informed by the Taisha in Shikoku via telecommunications that they were "hero" and "miko"-- the only sort of beings that could oppose the Vertexes. Those two were told to protect and guide the people of Suwa.

But Utano and Mito were mere 14-year-old girls. The residents of Nagano were unable to place complete confidence in the strength of such young girls.

Utano appealed to the hopeless, despairing people.

"We may be in a harsh situation right now, but I'm sure we'll find a means of survival. Humanity will always get back on its feet! So for now, we need to prepare for that moment. Let's all work together to live on!"

Utano swung her hoe, plowing the field.

"If we want to live in the barrier, we need to be self-sufficient. Let's cultivate the fields and catch fish! Whatever we can to survive!"

At first, Utano had few sympathizers.



There was no conceivable way humanity could survive in such a cramped, shut out land. Everyone had abandoned all hope... they believed they would all be wiped out sooner or later.

But Utano never gave up. She kept appealing to the people. She continued cultivating the field by herself.

"Humanity has kept surviving, no matter what calamities have come our way. I'm sure we can get back on our feet again!"

However, the Vertexes persistently commenced attacks in an attempt to destroy the barrier. And each time, Utano would fight them. If anybody from the outside came seeking shelter in Suwa, she would leave the barrier to save them, without any regard to her own safety.

And not once did she complain.

She always smiled.

Even if a Vertex injured her. Even if a resident disparaged her.

She continued to protect Suwa, unwilling to abandon even a single person.

And thus, after a year had passed--

As Utano continued to work hard without ever losing hope, one by one, the residents began helping her. Some cultivated the fields with her. Others provided boats so they could fish in Lake Suwa.

Eventually, smiles formed on their faces as well.

Instead of wallowing in their sorrow, they chose to work their bodies, clearing themselves of dark emotion. But it was by no means an escape from reality. The people had taken their first steps forward.

"No matter what hardships may come our way,

humanity will always get back on its feet--"

That had become a mantra for the people of Suwa.

As she watched the adults resting in the shade, Mito thought to herself.

(So in the end, Utanon singlehandedly pulled all of Suwa together, huh.)

Fighting the Vertexes and bestowing the people of Suwa with the will to live... It was all Utano's doing.

As she watched her friend bite into a tomato, Mito honestly thought of her as nothing less than amazing. Had their roles as hero and miko been reversed, Mito probably would not have been able to handle herself as Utano did.

--Suddenly, an ear-splitting siren rang out from a nearby area.

The adults' faces tensed.

The siren was an alarm of an incoming Vertex attack.

But without losing her calm, bright tone, Utano addressed everyone in the area.

"Scramble! The hero Shiratori Utano is off to battle!"

And without any hesitation, she broke out into a dash.

The sight of Utano acting like her normal self immediately dissipated the fear and tension in everyone's faces. Everyone cried out to the dashing hero.

"Go for it!" "Come back safe!" "I believe in you!" "We're counting on you!"

As she listened to those words of encouragement, Utano responded heartily.

"Sure thing! I swear I'll protect Suwa and everyone in it, so please take refuge as away from the barrier's boundary!"

"Wait, Utanon! I'm coming too!"

Mito chased after Utano.

Utano and Mito arrived at the Suwa Taisha kamisha honmiya (the upper main shrine) near the field. Utano's hero weapon and outfit were enshrined in its Kaguraden (ceremonial dance hall).

The guardian kami of Suwa was a god of war, a prince god of the earth. It was said that this god once used a wisteria vine as a weapon in a battle against another god. Imbued with divine might, his wisteria vine was powerful enough to crush the opposing god's weapon of iron.

The whip that served as Utano's hero weapon was imbued with the same spiritual power as that god of war's wisteria vine.

Utano stripped off her farming clothes and began garbing herself with the outfit imbued with the divine protection of the gods. It was somewhat hard to move in, but it reduced the damage done to the body.

"Mii-chan, which direction are the Vertexes coming from!?"

Utano asked as she changed.

Ever since the enemy raid siren began ringing, an abstract image had been floating in the back of Mito's head. A miko oracle. The local kami was telling her the site of the enemy invasion.

"Southeast from here! Their target is probably the kamisha maemiya (the upper old shrine)!"

"I bet they're after the maemiya's 'mihashira (sacred pillars)'. Heheh. Looks like it's time to set our stage then! The show's about to start!"



After she finished changing, Utano flew out of the kagura-den.

"Ahh~ she's gone."

Mito sighed as she watched her leave.

As a hero, Utano's running speed was beyond anything Mito could follow as a miko. Nevertheless, she couldn't just stand around doing nothing, so she followed Utano at a human's pace.

The Mihashira Barrier-- that was the name of the barrier protecting Suwa.

Suwa Taisha, which enshrined a local kami, was divided into four buildings in the vicinity of Lake Suwa: the kamisha honmiya, the kamisha maemiya, the shimosha harumiya (the lower spring shrine), and the shimosha akimiya (the lower fall shrine). Enclosed by the four shrines was a gigantic pillar. But upon the Vertex invasion three years ago, several similar pillars appeared along the boundary connecting the four shrines. The pillars formed a barrier within which the Vertexes could not enter.

However, the Vertexes appeared in a horde and continued to attack the mihashira forming the barrier.

The mihashira were by no means indestructible. If they were to be destroyed, collapsing the barrier, Suwa would be annihilated. As a hero, Utano's role was to protect the mihashira by countering any Vertexes that attacked them.

However, even heroes have their limits, and the waves of Vertexes kept growing in size. In response to the intensifying attacks, the local kami scaled the barrier down in size to scale it up in strength. Now in 2018, the shimosha harumiya and akimiya were already destroyed and only the southeast Lake Suwa area remained protected by the barrier.

By the time Mito arrived at the kamisha maemiya grounds with roughness of breath, Utano had already defeated most of the Vertexes.

Mito sighed in relief to see Utano safe.

(... Thank goodness. Looks like it's another safe battle.)

Utano moved her whip around the air at will, quickly and firmly striking each Vertex attacking the mihashira. The bodies of each struck monster corroded and vanished.

"And you're-- the last one!"

After striking down the final enemy, Utano took a deep breath and turned back towards Mito.





"Ah, Mii-chan. You came, huh."

"Well, yeah... I was worried."

"Heheh. There's no way I can lose. As you can see, it's a complete victory! You should be worrying about your own safety, Mii-chan. You should've evacuated."

The area near the mihashira which served as the barrier's boundary line was where the Vertexes could just barely invade. Mito was at risk of getting attacked.

"Though, I guess if it's just you, Mito, I can protect you! Welp, let's get back to ploughing."

With that nonchalant remark, Utano made an about face, leaving Mito somewhat surprised.

"What? You're still going to do farm work!? Shouldn't you at least give it a rest after fighting Vertexes?"

"Non, non. Crops wait for no man. Besides--"

The hero girl smiled.

"Plowing the fields is a precious 'routine' that I want to cherish."

Upon returning from the Vertex battle, Utano and Mito were showered with gracious gratitude.

Utano in particular received words of praise from the residents.

"Heh heh heh. There's more where that came from! Please, praise me more!"

Utano was quite self-confident, and a show off at that.

Afterwards, Utano returned to plowing the fields with the people as Mito watched.

And such was the daily routine for Utano and Mito-- or rather, the daily routine of Suwa as a whole.

Though the people feared the monster menace, they offered their prayers to the gods, to the hero, and to the miko, living their lives meagerly, but eagerly.

Since Suwa did not receive as many divine blessings as Shikoku, they were lacking in materials and resources, making life difficult. Even so, the people found happiness in living a quiet life of self-sufficiency.

As Utano swung her hoe underneath the blue sky, Mito could only wish she could watch her fondly like this forever.

Fujimori Mito was a very timid, mature girl.

Before she could even remember, she was on bad terms with her parents and grandparents, and thus she was perhaps a little overanalytical about people's facial expressions.

She was bad at asserting herself, her personality was gloomy, and people would often say they had no clue what she was thinking. As a result, she lost her self confidence, she would get too caught up in her thoughts, lose even more self confidence... and she kept digging herself into a deeper and deeper hole.

By the time she entered middle school, she had become a girl lacking in both a will and a presence.

"You've got trouble coming your way in the future if you don't change yourself."

Mito's mother said coldly in frustration at her daughter's character.

Mito couldn't even begin to imagine her own future. But she suspected that her life would end the same way it was now: she would accomplish nothing, attract no attention, and live her days quietly.

For that reason, Mito's meeting with Utano came as a huge shock.

Utano had a completely undaunting personality. She stood before everyone else and brought people together.

She never hesitated in consideration of what negative thoughts others might have. She triumphantly marched down whatever path she believed in.

And before she knew it, Utano was at the center of everyone's attention.

She's like the exact opposite of me-- Mito thought.

One day, near the end of August.

Utano was using a telecommunications device installed in the kamisha's sanshu-den (assembly hall) to contact Shikoku. Shikoku was the only other known bastion of humanity besides Suwa, and was defended by five heroes led by a girl named Nogi Wakaba. Utano was currently speaking with that Wakaba.

"Yes, there was another attack today, but the enemy was safely repulsed. ... Yes, I am indeed that strong, despite how I look. Wait, you can't see me through this thing, can you? ... Yes, as usual, we worked on cultivating some fields. ... I wish I could just send you some of our famous Shinshu vegetables, Nogi-san."

Mito read a book in the corner of the room and peeked at Utano conversing with Wakaba.

She looked like she was having fun talking to her.

At times like these, Mito felt a feeling she couldn't quite describe. Her heart would stir, and she couldn't calm it.

"Very well, same time, then. ... Ending transmission."

Utano cut communications with Shikoku. She then turned to Mito and gave her a dubious look.

"Mii-chan, what's with the glare?"



"... Utanon, there's something weird about the way you talk when you're communicating with Shikoku. You speak all formally like you're trying to be an adult. It doesn't fit you."

"Well, it's technically professional work for me, since communicating officially with Shikoku as a hero, so I need to be polite. I mean, look, doesn't everyone try to sound polite on the phone or in letters?"

"No."

Mito replied curtly.

"Huh? But why are you calling out only me? Nogi-san doesn't speak casually either. Actually, now that I think about it, the way Nogi-san speaks makes her sound kind of like an old-school bushi or something. It's kinda funny, actually. I wonder if she speaks like that normally? Oh, speaking of Nogi-san, just the other day--"

"I'm going to eat dinner."

Before Utano could finish, Mito stood up. For some reason she didn't want to hear another word.

"Wait, wait, Mii-chan!"

Flustered, Utano grabbed Mito's hand to stop her.

"I'll go too. Food tastes better when I eat it with you, Mii-chan."

"..."

The sight of Utano's nonchalant smile calmed down Mito's heart.

"... Okay, let's go."

Underneath the sky dyed crimson by the setting sun, Utano and Mito entered a soba store.

Shinshu soba-- a dish local to Nagano.

The buckwheat that goes into soba is easy to raise in cold, high-altitude soil, and is thus suitable for Nagano's climate. Thus, soba became widely made in Nagano as an irreplaceable staple of the residents' diet. Masterfully handmade soba noodles require proper ratios of buckwheat flour and water, and only the noodles that pass strict conditions have the honor of being called "Shinshu soba".

"Yeah, it's yummy!"

Deeply moved, Utano praised the food as she slurped the zaru soba. The fact that she could eat it essentially every day without tiring of it was proof of the excellence of Shinshu soba's quality.

"Soba in warm broth is good too, but in the summer, zaru soba is the best. It's truly a cool dish."

"Utanon, you always get a large serving, don't you?"

"You gotta eat if you want to have the strength to plow the fields! Soba in particular has an amazing amino acid score of 100%!"

"Amino acid score...?"

"Basically, soba's made outta the good stuff!"

As Utano spoke, she ate at twice the rate Mito was.

"But if we don't increase the number of buckwheat fields, we might not have enough buckwheat flour. Buckwheat grows fast enough to have two harvests a year, but to be honest, the high ground outside the barrier is better suited for cultivation than what we've got..."

Even as she ate, Utano's mind was apparently focused on her beloved farm work.

"... Utanon, I'm sorry about earlier."

"Huh? What for?"

"I'm sorry for acting mad..."

What displeased Mito was the fact that Utano was getting along with someone besides her. Childish jealousy.

"You're just so radiant in my eyes, Utanon. You're always so proactive, so hard-working, and you're always the center of attention... I'm sure everyone in Nagano, and even Nogi-san in Shikoku loves you, Utanon."

In contrast, Mito had a negative character, and only had Utano to call a friend. For that reason, seeing Utano get along with someone else made her feel insecure. She felt like she was getting left behind.

"I think you're popular with everyone yourself, Mii-chan. Everyone in Nagano loves you and thinks you're cool."

"That's only because I happened to be chosen as a miko... That's why I became your friend, too. People only see me as special for what I am rather than who I am."

Even before she had the social standing of a hero, Utano was originally proactive and hard-working, so everyone thought well of her. There was a fundamental difference between her and Mito, who was loved "because" she was a miko. "Because" she was Shiratori Utano's partner.

(I have nothing... I just happened to be chosen as a miko. I'm sure that's why everyone--)



"Hey, come on, Mii-chan!"

Utano scolded Mito and poked her in the forehead.

"Don't think so negatively in hindsight, Mii-chan. You just don't realize your own awesomeness. Just trust me, I know. You've saved people, Mii-chan."

"Huh...?"

"You saved a child who escaped from the barrier from a Vertex, remember? You left the barrier yourself, distracted the Vertex... and the kid used that opportunity to escape to safety. That was amazing."

"That's... only because in the end, you came to save us. If it were just me, then the kid and I would've both been killed..."

"But still, not everyone can do that. I might save people using the power I was given, but what you did is way, way, way braver than that. And that's what makes you-- a hero, Mii-chan."

"Thank you..."

Mito looked away in embarrassment.

(But the only reason I even thought of working hard and trying to save people like that... was because you were standing in front of things and taking charge, Utanon.)

Utano's existence gave Mito strength.

Utano's existence made Mito special. At least a little bit.

Day by day, it became more and more difficult to connect the line between Suwa and Shikoku.

"Obviously, udon is better... ZZZZ... not even worth comparing."

"You're right about that last part. It's not worth comparing since soba is clearly better."

"... ZZZ... have you even eaten Kagawa udon before? ... ZZZ... its unparalleled, beautiful pure white-ness..."

Both Utano and Mito could tell that the power of Suwa's local kami was weakening.

Regardless, Utano kept showing her bright, proactive appearance and behavior.

Each day, she plowed the fields.

She fought the invading Vertexes.

Every now and then, she communicated with Shikoku.

--And eventually, Suwa spent its fourth summer after the Vertexes first appeared.

And then on September.

The enemy launched a full-scale attack.

Their numbers were way too many. Utano became quite injured.

The Vertex swarm surrounded her, rammed into her, chewed away at her with mouth-like organs... but nevertheless, she defeated all of her enemies, leaving Suwa unscathed in its entirety.

After the battle was over, but before Utano went to the hospital, she went to the telecommunications device in the kamisha honmiya's sanshu-den.

"Utanon, what are you doing!? You need to get your injuries treated!"

Mito chased her from behind, shouting such, but Utano forced a smile and answered.

"Today's... a scheduled day to contact Shikoku, isn't it? I'm a little late, though..."

She had missed the arranged contact time by two hours.

"Treating your wounds comes first!"

"Contacting Shikoku is another part of my precious 'routine'. So I need to maintain it--"

Just then, Shikoku called in.

Utano turned the receiver on.

"--This is Nogi from Shikoku. We established contact late today, so did anything... ZZZ... ZZZ..."

The transmission noise was louder than usual. Words could only be heard intermittently.

"I'm sorry, Nogi-san. There was a kind of a big battle over here, so it was a little hectic."

"... ZZZ... That's fine. Did anything happen... ZZZZZZ..."

"This afternoon, there was a skirmish with the Vertexes."

"... ZZZZZZ... Any damage... ZZZ..."

"No problems here. I got a little injured, but I repelled the enemy. No human casualties."

At times her face would warp in the pain from her injuries, but Utano kept speaking as if things were normal.

Mito felt helpless as she watched her.

The barrier shrank, the local kami's power weakened, and the Vertex attacks intensified.



Even Utano had to realize it-- Suwa was unlikely to last much longer.

(Kami of the land... we're at our limits...!)

Mito shouted out in her mind. But she could not tell if her voice reached any ears. Though she was a miko, any divine communication had been one-way-- miko merely received oracles from the gods.

In a past oracle, back when Shikoku had arranged Vertex counter-methods, it was told that Shikoku and Suwa were to perform a pincer attack to reclaim territory. Shikoku had an anti-Vertex organization known as the "Taisha" and they even had five heroes. It was told that if only they were to prepare for it, the situation of the war would change for the better, so they should bide their time until then. However--

(We can't wait any longer...! Suwa can't... Utanon can't... go on any longer...!)

It wouldn't be long before Mito received a new oracle:

The enemy was launching a large-scale attack unlike anything ever seen.

Perhaps a Vertex general offensive.

The barrier was likely crumbling.

And-- an invasion of Suwa was was inevitable.

But even after the oracle was received, there was no visible change in Utano. She looked over the crops nearing harvest and cheerfully spoke.

"Pumpkin, daikon, corn. Yup, everything's growing good. Gotta think of what to plant next soon, huh... Hey, Mii-chan. What kinds of seeds do you think are left in the honmiya storage?"

"... I think there's a good variety left. Like buckwheat or daikon..."

Mito desperately tried to hide the quivering in her voice.

"Ah, sounds good. It's the perfect season to plant buckwheat and daikon."

"--Utanon...!"

Mito struggled to find the words to say to the brightly speaking Utano.

"Utanon, how can you act like everything's normal...? Aren't you scared!? Tomorrow, we're already gonna be...!"

Killed. She couldn't get that last word out of her throat.

No matter how strong Utano was, she would likely lose to enemy numbers surpassing those of the previous battle.

Furthermore, if the barrier crumbled, then nothing would be stopping the monsters from rushing into Suwa.

And then Suwa would be no more.

But Utano smiled just as she always did--

"I am scared. I really, truly am."

--and said just that.

Utano's smile gradually crumbled into a face filled with fear. Mito had never seen Utano like this before.

"But even if I'm scared... I don't want to sit back and do nothing. Anything but that. The thought of freezing in fear and doing nothing... as people die in front of me... Now that's even scarier..."

That was surely Utano's true thoughts.

Utano was forcing herself to work hard too-- even Mito could tell.

But a smile soon returned to the hero's face.

"It's okay. I'm not alone. I've got you, Mii-chan. And even if they're far away, we've got hero friends in Shikoku. And so... and so... I can keep at it."

"...!!"

Mito nearly broke out into tears. But she frantically held them back. She couldn't let herself cry if Utano herself wasn't crying.

"I know! Mii-chan, there's something I want to do. I want to leave some proof we were here... a record of our thoughts and feelings. Something to find for the people who one day will surely come here."

Utano brought in a large wooden box and placed a hoe and a sheet of paper inside.

Afterwards, Utano and Mito dug up some soil beside the field and buried the wooden box inside.

"If someday, someone finds this box... our feelings will reach them. And I'm sure... we can entrust them with our wish."

Utano spoke with a smile.

The setting sun stretched out their shadows.



And then, the day of the final battle began.

"... Finish!"

Utano struck down the last Vertex that had attacked the kamisha honmiya's mihashira. The white monster shrieked as it disintegrated.

"Haah... haah... way to go, me. You're so strong..."

Mito rushed up to support Utano before she fell.

"Utanon! Hang in there!"

"Ugh... thank you."

Just how many waves had she defeated already today? The Vertex raid siren had been blaring constantly since morning.

Although heroes had beyond human stamina, Utano's fatigue was reaching its limit. Her body was clearly injured as well.

But the battle so far hadn't seen the full effort yet from the Vertexes. There weren't nearly as many enemies as the oracle had foretold. At most, these had been advanced troops sent to either check out the situation or to whittle down Utano's stamina.

Suddenly, an abstract image floated in the back of Mito's mind.

(Ah... another... oracle...)

The oracle's meaning--

An extraordinary number of Vertexes would appear surrounding Suwa's barrier.

"Here it comes... this is the general offensive..."

Mito's body wouldn't stop shaking.

The end of Suwa had begun.

But nonetheless, Utano...

"... It's about time I contacted Shikoku, huh. Gotta go..."

Battered and in the face of despair, Utano tried to maintain her daily routine.

Not even Mito had had it in her to stop Utano now.

Mito supported Utano as the two of them headed to the sanshu-den.

"... No, I just exterminated some annoyingly persistent Vertexes, that's all... It's like I've been fighting since early in the morning... Looks like the communications device was broken as a result of the Vertex invasion, huh. ... Doesn't look like we'll be able to communicate for a while."

In the sanshu-den, Mito silently watched as Utano talked through the communications device while concealing her injuries and fatigue.

The communications device being broken was a lie. But today, Suwa was done for. So either way, they would no longer be able to communicate.

"I think it's going to be tough over there too... but please do your best. As long as you don't give up, I'm sure you'll manage. ... I thought it was an impossible duty at first too, but... I've kept it up two years longer than expected. I've grown lots of vegetables too... and I've made friends with you, Nogi-san... It's been a pleasure. Ahh, geez, there's so much noise... We can hardly hear each other, huh."

Utano gave her final words of the transmission through gritted teeth.

"Nogi-san, the rest is up to you. Please take care."

She ended transmissions there.

The communications device would likely never reconnect to Shikoku again.

Mito sidled up to Utano and gently embraced her. No matter how hard she tried, Mito could not stop the tears flowing from her eyes.

"Please don't cry, Mii-chan."

An awkward smile spread across Utano's face. Utano's attitude never changed, not even in times like these.

"... I just received an oracle. The last one, apparently..."

"What did it say?"

Utano gently asked the weeping Mito.

"We did well to protect Suwa for three whole years... Since the two of us kept the enemy distracted so long, Shikoku was able to lay down a foundation of defense against the enemy."

"I see..."

So Suwa was a decoy to let Shikoku prepare for battle. Utano and Mito had vaguely noticed that fact, so it was no surprise.

"This is just..."

Too much, Mito thought.

But Utano, however, smiled in relief.

"Thank goodness... really. So our three-year struggle wasn't meaningless then, huh."

Utano and Mito stood within the kamisha honmiya grounds.

They saw huge numbers of Vertexes floating around the circumference of the barrier, enough to cover the sky. One group fused, forming a new, different, gigantic form.

Before long, the monsters would all surge in at once.



"Hey, Utanon."

"What is it?"

"Your future goal is to be a farm king, right?"

"Yeah, I want lots of people to eat my vegetables. That's my dream."

"I see. ...You know, I've never had a dream of my own."

"..."

"I've always thought I'd spend my life accomplishing nothing. So... I've never had a dream or anything."

"Mii-chan..."

"But you see, that all changed when I met you, Utanon. As long as you were by my side, I felt like I could be anything."

"Yeah..."

"So... I want to run a vegetable delivery service. That way I can spread your vegetables all across Japan. No, all across the world."

"... The world? You mean the whole el mundo!?"

"Yeah. The whole world."

"¡Excelente!"

"I won't know how to do everything at first. I'll argue with you over business matters, and it won't start out too well."

"Yeah."

"But even if we fight, we'll quickly make up. And gradually, I'll be able to deliver everything properly."

"Yeah, yeah!"

"Your vegetables' popularity will spread by word of mouth and in no time, we'll have tons of orders rushing in. I'll be busy every day delivering them."

"Yeah."

"And eventually, the adults, the children, the poor, the rich, and everyone in-between will eat your vegetables with smiles on their faces."

"..."

"That's... my dream."

"... In that case..."





Utano looked up to the Vertex-covered sky.

"Then for the sake of our dream, we can't let this world fall to ruin, can we!?"

All at once, the white monsters began rushing towards the kamisha honmiya.

"Mii-chan. To tell you the truth, I've been working hard every day till now because you were there beside me."

Utano said with a smile.

The hero girl kicked off of the ground.

"Yeah... I'm with you to the very end, Utanon. I'll keep watching you from here..."

As she watched Utano head off toward the horde of monsters one last time, Mito stayed in one place, her feet fixed to the ground, her eyes fixed upon Utano.

(Extra Chapter End)

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME ELEVEN!!
11

NOVEL



ガーリッシュナンバー

著：渡 航

キャラクター原案・扉絵：QP:flapper

挿絵：やむ茶

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）

執筆：朱白あおい　イラスト：BUNBUN　監修：Project 2H

［ DENGEKI G's NOVEL ］ 電撃G's magazine 2016年7月号付録② 分売不可


TAISHA RECORD DEPARTMENT • MIKO-SAMA
CENSORED
Hero Record

乃木若葉は勇者である

vol.11

Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JWWORKS
Supervision by Project 2H

第十一話 ―種子―



企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JWWORKS
監修／Project 2H

©2014 Project 2H



--Wakaba closed the diary after she had read it.

Her hands were shaking. Rage and helplessness stormed in her heart.

The other girls surrounded Wakaba and peeked into the diary. Various expressions arose on their faces... sadness, fear, rage, anxiety.

-"Wakaba-chan..."

Hinata peered into Wakaba's face in concern.

-"... It's okay, Hinata."

Wakaba shook her head and tried to console Hinata, but was unsure if she could pretend as if everything were indeed okay.

Wakaba walked up to the pile of corpses in the fountain and placed the diary softly beside it. She then silently placed her hands together while ruminating over the contents of the diary--

Some day in 2015.

How many days has it been since we've hid ourselves underground? My smartphone battery has died long ago, and I have no way of checking the date.

Some people have hoarded the batteries and mobile chargers that were in the underground shopping mall stores, so we can't use them. That said, even if we could use our smartphones, the airwaves seem to be dead, so they'd be pretty much useless outside of checking the time and date.

Anyway, at this rate, we'll forget our sense of time. So to prevent that from happening, I decided to start keeping a diary today. Besides, once we're rescued, there might be some value in having some kind of record of the days we spent here.

Some day in 2015.

I think for now, we should sort through our current situation.

Thanks to those monsters that appeared out of the sky in July, the town we lived is now in shambles. Tons of people died. Mom and Dad too...

My younger sister and I barely escaped with our lives and took refuge in the Umeda underground mall. Many other people had taken refuge there too. All of the exits have been barricaded, so those monsters can't get in.

We've been hiding in the underground mall ever since. No idea how it is on the surface. I wonder if my high school friends are safe. It frightens me just thinking about it.

Some day in 2015.

A fight broke out again today. A fight seems to break out among the underground mall dwellers just about every day. There are several causes. Scrambling over rations. Minor disagreements. Simple harassment of weaker people...

Some adults with strong senses of justice created rules to protect the young, the elderly, and the women. They also set up a system to fairly distribute rations. Without those people, we probably wouldn't be alive right now.

Some day in 2015.

It seems someone died in a fight that broke out today.

We all came here to escape the monsters, and yet now we have a casualty caused by human conflict. It's ridiculous!

But deadly conflicts are happening again and again. It's decreased after the adults set up the rules, but back when the barricades were just getting set up, it was really horrible. Since food is limited, some ruffians try to use violence to hoard it all to themselves.

Right before my eyes, a woman was killed with her infant still in her arms. And all she wanted was milk for her baby!

The corpses of the dead are gathered in a designated area. Leaving them where they died would be both a hygienic and mental nightmare, after all. Ahh, it's like I'm writing about corpses as inhuman objects, huh.

Maybe my senses have started going crazy too.

Some day in 2015.

My little sister burst into tears. She kept crying that she wanted to go home.

She's normally a calm and selfless child, but I guess she's reached her limit. An adult got irritated at her crying and told me to kill her or put her outside. But the exits are barricaded, so we can't get out. If we lifted the barricade, the monsters would all flood in.

Some day in 2015.

I feel like we've been in this underground mall for ages.

Food supply shortages are becoming a problem. Since no new food is coming in, the supply's just depleting.

The adults talked and two options came up: kill the sick and elderly to reduce the number of mouths, or lift the barricade and search for food. But in the end, no conclusion was reached, it seems.

Some day in 2015.

For food today, we had two dietary supplement blocks and half a bag of snack sweets. Not for one meal, but for the entire day! Looks like the food supply shortage was worse than I thought.

The adults have been discussing how to handle the food supply shortage since yesterday.

Some people say that since the sick and elderly won't live long, we should just hurry up and kill them anyway to save on food. Obviously, though, most people aren't on board. Me neither.

Some people say that we should lift the barricade and go outside. They say that since a long time has passed, perhaps the monsters are already gone. But since nobody knows if the surface is really safe or not, many people are against the notion.

In the end, no conclusion was reached today either.



Some day in 2015.

My little sister's not doing well. She hasn't gotten up since morning. She responds when I call to her, but she seems out of it.

She might be sick with something. But I don't know what.

There was a doctor among the people who took refuge in the underground mall, so I had her examined, but since the doctor had no examination tools, it seems we can't know the specifics of her illness.

We had her take some basic nutrients from a drug store. There was not much else we could do for her.

Some day in 2015.

My little sister's still not doing well today. Things could get bad if this keeps up.

But there's nothing I can do.

Some day in 2015.

I need to get her to a hospital...

Some day in 2015.

My little sister's not responding. What do I do what do I do what do I do what do I do what do I do what do I do

Some day in 2015.

A horrible fight broke out.

The people advocating to kill to save on food have unilaterally begun to do just that. They killed several sick and elderly.

They killed my little sister too. I won't forgive them!! I won't forgive them!! I won't forgive them!!

But the diehards who started the killing soon found themselves killed by the opposing faction.

Nothing makes any sense! Why can't we all cooperate!? We'll all be dead at this rate!

My little sister was carried to the corpse pile by the fountain.

Maybe I should just die already too.

Some day in 2015.

It's been a while since I last opened this diary. After my little sister died, I just hadn't ever felt like doing anything, so I didn't write anything.

The underground mall population has decreased significantly as well. Many died in the conflict that claimed my little sister, and the conflict didn't end there. Many also died of illness or suicide.

But even with fewer mouths to feed, there's still too little food to feed them with.

Some day in 2015.

Another fight broke out. Between those that advocated leaving to the surface and those opposed. I really don't care either way. I don't care.

After all, there might not have even been a point in locking ourselves in here. Just a choice of death at the hands of humans or death by the jaws of monsters.

If we were just going to end up killing each other, it would've been better if the monsters just killed us from the start instead.

Some day in 2015.

The people advocating leaving to the surface unilaterally destroyed a barricade. It's the same pattern as before. Nothing more can be done.

The monsters were still on the surface. They rushed in one after another through the destroyed barricade. No matter how many fire prevention shutters we lock, no matter how many tables and chairs we pile up, those monsters tear through them like it's nothing.

I'm sure if they ever thought about it, they could've just eaten through the barricade from the start and annihilated all the people underground all at once. But perhaps they prioritized destroying the surface. Or perhaps they knew that all they had to do was wait and the underground refugees would annihilate themselves through unsightly conflict.

I am now at the corpse pile.

I wanted to see my little sister one last time.



-"So this... is how it ended..."

Wakaba muttered before the mountain of corpses.

Even in the depths of despair, cornered by the Vertexes, people tried to survive. If even one hero were among those in the underground mall, perhaps the situation would've been different.

(If only I were there... maybe I could've saved them...)

Though she knew there was nothing she could do about it now, bitterness stung Wakaba's heart.

The very next moment, from the darkness beyond the passageway, a heavy thud and a grinding noise could be heard.

-"Vertexes...!?"

Nothing else could have conceivably appeared in a place like that.

Wakaba firmly gripped the handle of her sword. Rage towards the monsters boiled through her body. But she did not lose her composure.

-"... There are no more survivors in this underground mall. Let's escape on the double! Hinata, don't leave my side!"

As she shouted that order to her friends, Wakaba unsheathed her sword. The other heroes drew their weapons in succession as well.

And at the same time, giant white monsters appeared out from the underground passage.

Wakaba stood at the helm, felling Vertexes while making way to the surface. She had already had a general idea of the underground mall's layout in her head. Without any hesitation holding her back, she kept pressing forward.

In the meantime, as Chikage slayed the monsters with her scythe, she recalled the contents of the diary. While the contents had filled Wakaba with rage towards the Vertexes, they provided Chikage with a different emotion.

Rather than rage towards the Vertexes, what Chikage felt was the powerlessness, the shame, the misery of the cornered people.

The people who, with neither the power nor the courage to oppose the Vertexes, had no choice but to shut themselves away in the dark and spend their final days in fear.

When faced with a force too fierce to fight, the weak are left with nothing to fight but each other.

In the end, no matter how critical the situation, humans are unable to cooperate from the bottom of their hearts.

And--

To her, the underground mall community seemed like a microcosm of the eventual fate awaiting Shikoku.

People were shut in the small world they called Shikoku.

The situation was stable right now, but if a more critical situation were to arise-- the people of Shikoku would surely begin unsightly conflict like the people of the underground mall. Driven into a corner, they would steal from each other, wound each other, and reach an ending deprived of their dignity as human beings.

(I... won't end like that...!)

Swinging her scythe, mowing down the monsters, Chikage glared through the darkness of the underground passage.

(I... have the power of a hero...! Such a miserable death is the last thing I want...! I will live... respected as a hero... until the very end...!)

After leaving the underground mall, the heroes threw down any attacking Vertexes as they looked around Osaka as a whole.

However, as they were still unable to find any survivors, they decided to head towards their next destination.

As they leapt their way, the girls remained mostly silent. For they felt if they were to open their mouths, only dark words would spill out.

After Osaka, they headed for Nagoya.

But no longer did anyone dare say -"this time for sure".

Eventually, Wakaba and the others landed on the roof of a large building in front of Nagoya Station. From there, they were high enough to have an unbroken view of the area.

However, the sight of the town in its entirety was not much different from what they had seen so far. Collapsed buildings. Roads buried in rubble. Abandoned cars--

-"Whoa, whoa... what's that?"

Tamako grimaced as she pointed towards the station.

The area around the station and beyond was covered with countless giant egg-shaped objects.

An uncanny sight, inducing physiological unease.

Wakaba strained her eyes and focused her sight. Using her hero power to enhance her senses, she saw the egg-shaped objects clearly as if she used a telescope. She could tell something was wriggling inside each eggshell.

Wakaba had never seen such huge eggs before. But just what sort of eggs were those--

-"...!!"



Just the thought of it made Wakaba nauseous.

The egg spawning ground spread fairly far and wide.

Anzu crumbled to her knees on the spot.

-"...ugh..."

-"Are you okay, Anzu!?"

A flustered Tamako supported Anzu.

-"I'm... okay... Just a little... surprised..."

Despite her words, Anzu's face was pale as a ghost, tears streaming from her eyes.

Wakaba was painfully aware of why Anzu was so shocked.

(Is this... the ultimate fate of a land invaded by the Vertexes...?)

To have all man-made structures swept away to become the monsters' occupied territory. As if to say that the land no longer belonged to man.

-"... One day... our Shikoku... will be like this too..."

Anzu murmured in a shaky voice.

-"Tama's not gonna let that happen!"

Tamako firmly shouted as if to clear away Anzu's anxiety. Not just to calm Anzu, but perhaps to cheer herself up as well. Tamako continued with a bellow:

-"That's what we heroes are for! They may have gotten their way yesterday, but this won't happen tama-rrow! These weirdo monsters... are notta match for humans!"

Tamako's words perhaps cheering her up at least a little bit, Anzu smiled faintly.

-"I see. You're right... We have to work hard..."

Anzu wiped her tears and stood up on her own.

At that moment, Hinata let out a stern shout as she looked around.

-"Guys! We're in a tough situation here! We're surrounded...!"

Wakaba looked around from the rooftop. She could see Vertexes floating around here and there in the sky.

The monsters appeared out of nowhere, their numbers rising at a dreadful pace.

A bitter look spread across Wakaba's face as she bit her lip.

Were the Taisha incorrect in their prediction of Vertex numbers diminishing? Or did the monsters just have a tendency to multiply their numbers in such short times?

The monsters surrounded the girls in a wide, encroaching ring.

They were perhaps planning to attack all at once.

-"... Now you've made Tama angry..."

Tamako glared at the Vertexes.

-"I'm not gonna let you steal this world away from us! i'll do anything it takes to stop you!"

-"Tamako, wait--"

Before Wakaba could stop her, Tamako had already activated a hero's trump card. She accessed the Shinju from far off Shikoku soil to draw the power of the fairy "Wanyuudou"(輸入道, the wheel monk).

The next moment, her bladed yo-yo grew gigantic. Tamako used her whole body to hurl the deadly weapon larger than herself at the Vertexes.

-"Gooooooooo!!"

The giant bladed yo-yo glided through the air as the blades along its circumference spun like a chainsaw, tearing through the monsters surrounding the building. The rotating blades caught on fire, ripping and burning through the Vertexes with tremendous force.

After exterminating the midair enemies, the bladed yo-yo attacked the egg-shaped objects covering the ground.

Embued with the power of Wanyuudou, the giant bladed yo-yo burned the eerie eggs into nothingness.

-"Tamako, don't use trump cards so easily like that!"

-"Sorry, Wakaba. I just got pissed off all of a sudden... Well, not that I regret anything."

Using the power of the fairies is a huge burden on the hero's body. They were not entirely sure what influence the beyond-human power of the fairies would have on the human body. For that reason, the heroes were to avoid using the power of the fairies as much as possible.

Despite Tamako's in-the-moment personality, she too knew full well the risk of using trump cards. Despite that, she had to use one. She felt that unless she thoroughly crushed the sight before her eyes, her heart would be torn in two.

Not just hers-- but Anzu's heart as well.

After incinerating the Vertexes and the eggs covering the ground, Tamako returned the bladed yo-yo to herself and jumped onto it.

-"Since I've already brought it out, why don't we ride this thing and take a look around Nagoya? It'd be faster to search from the sky, wouldn't it?"



-"... Yeah."

Beginning with Wakaba, all the other girls boarded the giant bladed yo-yo.

--And even in Nagoya, no survivors were found.

Since it was unthinkable they'd find survivors in the egg-covered area, the search ended quickly.

Once they returned to the building in front of the station, Tamako's bladed yo-yo returned to its normal size, perhaps due to exhaustion.

-"Ahh, it really is tough using trump cards."

Tamako sat down on the roof and breathed a sigh.

-"Please don't use them any more. We really don't know the full extent of their influence."

-"I know, I know."

Tamako answered Wakaba with a wry smile before falling silent and gazing at her bladed yo-yo pensively.

-"..."

-"What's wrong, Tamacchi-sempai?"

Anzu spoke up in concern.

Tamako snapped back to.

-"Ahh, no, it's nothing! I just spaced out for a second there. Now then... Guess we can't rest forever, eh. According to our plan, we've gotta get to Suwa before the day's done, right?"

Tamako looked at Hinata as she said that.

-"Yes, that's right, but..."

Hinata tilted her head to the side, a little concerned about the expression Tamako had on her face for a second back there.

-"Tamako-san, if you're tired, it'd be better if we rested here for--"

-"No need! Tama doesn't want to drag everyone down! Come on, let's get going. Suwa's thattaway, right?"

Interrupting Hinata's words, Tamako quickly readied herself to jump from the building's rooftop.

-"Tamacchi-sempai, wait!"

-"What, Anzu? You want to stop me too? Too bad, 'cause nobody can stop Tama!"

-"... No, it's just that Suwa's the other way."

-"... Oh."





Tamako blushed just a little before heading the right way to Suwa.

The girls' next destination was Suwa-- the Lake Suwa area in Nagano prefecture.

Until last year, Suwa was a bastion of human survival with a barrier like Shikoku and protected by a hero named Shiratori.

The Chuo Expressway led from Nagoya south-east to Suwa.

The asphalt of the long road connecting Nagoya, Nagano, and Tokyo had now been torn to shreds by Vertex teeth. The half-bitten wreckage of cars littered the road.

As they approached Nagano, Wakaba's heart filled with both hope and fear.

Wakaba had exchanged many words with Shiratori who was in Suwa. Though they had never met, Wakaba thought of her as a good friend.

When communications were cut last year, she was told there was a high probability that Suwa had been destroyed. But until she saw everything with her own eyes, Suwa's destruction wasn't certain. Nor was Shiratori's death.

And for that reason-- Wakaba was afraid to find out for sure.

-"You mustn't avert your eyes."

As if she had surmised Wakaba's feelings, Hinata lightly brushed her cheek.

-"I'm sure Shiratori-san wants you to know what happened to Suwa too, Wakaba-chan. No matter what happened... Because she must've seen you as a friend too."

Hinata spoke stern words with a gentle tone.

The Lake Suwa area has a four-building shrine known as the Suwa Taisha. That four-building shrine became a keystone in the formation of the barrier, protecting human survival. That said, as the Vertex attacks intensified, the barrier gradually shrank. By the time communications ceased last year, the only safe area was the south-east area near Lake Suwa.

Once the heroes reached Lake Suwa, they headed south towards the Suwa Taisha's main shrine.
The Nagano townscape along the way was, like the other areas, a wreck. The barrier that had been protecting humanity was no more. An unpleasant premonition suddenly surged within Wakaba's head.
They reached the main shrine.

But--

There was not much left to be called a "shrine".

The torii, the kagura hall, the shrine office, the assembly room... everything had been reduced to timber and stone rubble. As if it had personally taken on all sorts of natural disasters... Out of all the areas they had seen, this had been the most brutally destroyed. There was not a hint of the building's originally intended shape, nor was a single man-made thing remaining. And of course, there was not a person in sight.

If Vertexes merely preyed on humans, then there would've been no need for destruction this thorough. And yet the natural-born enemy destroyed everything as if to undo all traces of humans out of some personal grudge.

-"Khh...!"

A wordless groan leaked out of Wakaba's throat.

With its barrier gone, and the Vertexes having trampled everything down... the probability of finding any survivors in Suwa was exceedingly low.

But Wakaba looked up.

-"Let's search... for any survivors."

The girls split up and searched the heart of the main shrine.

As the sun began to set, staining the sky red--

Near the base of Mount Moriya, near the main shrine, they found a farm field.

Amongst all the wreckage, it was a faint trace left by man. Though it was overgrown by weeds and easy to overlook, it was certainly a field cultivated by human hands.

-"Huh...?"

Yuuna noticed something just barely jutting out from the ground beside the farm field. She rushed up to that spot and began digging. The others silently followed Yuuna's lead.

They kept digging at the soil without minding if their hands got scraped.

Eventually, the buried object was visible. It was a wooden box about as tall as a person.

-"Did someone leave this behind...?"

Wakaba gasped as she opened the lid.

What came out was... a hoe. And a folded letter.



Nice to meet you.

No, wait, Nogi-san might be the one reading this, so it'd be weird to say "nice to meet you", huh.

Then again, I haven't actually met Nogi-san in person, so I guess maybe "nice to meet you" is right after all.

Sorry. I don't know how exactly I'd go about writing this, so I ended up writing something pointlessly long.

If the one who finds this letter isn't Nogi-san, then I can just ask them to deliver it to her. Nogi Wakaba is a hero of Shikoku.

Anyway, it's been about three years already since the day the Vertexes appeared. I've somehow managed to protect Suwa, but the barrier's gradually shrinking. It's truly an urgent situation. I am a hero, so I know it's unbecoming of me to say something so timid, but Suwa probably won't hold out for much longer.

But even if Suwa meets its end, Nogi-san and the others will still be there in Shikoku.

The world may be in shambles, but judging from the history of the past, humanity has always revived itself no matter what wars or natural disasters have come our way.

So even if we're in a tough time now, I'm sure things will be fine as long as we don't give up.

Nogi Wakaba-san. My precious friend whom I've yet to meet.

I'm so glad I got to know you, even in an age like this.

I pray that you will be safe even during this war with the Vertexes.

I pray that you will be able to protect this world.

I just want humanity to be protected to the very end. Even if I'm not the one who can keep protecting it. As long as someone, a hero like you, Nogi-san, can continue to protect the world, that's fine by me. I will fulfil my part of that goal.

As long as I can.

Once this calamity has been overcome, and the time comes to cultivate and resurrect the soil of the land, I'd be happy if only this hoe could be used to help out in that endeavor.

Because it'll feel like I'm with you, cultivating the land by your side.

-"..."

Wakaba's sight blurred with tears. Her hands tightened around the letter, crumpling the paper.

Her friends, peeking at the letter over her shoulder, all found themselves at a loss for words.

Seemingly at the end of her patience, Chikage clenched her fist and bit down on her lip.

-"It's... the same here... everything's been... destroyed...!"

-"No, not everything..."

Yuuna shook her head. She took the hoe out of the wooden box that held the letter and gently cradled it in her arms as if it were a small child.

-"This was left behind. The baton Shiratori-san passed to us, I'm sure..."

Yuuna held out the hoe to Wakaba.

Wakaba took it, holding it firmly in both hands.

Heroes born in different places, but in the same age were connected here and now through that baton.

-"We... finally meet, Shiratori. I'll succeed your dying wish."

What the hero of Suwa left behind in her name was truly a glimmer of hope shining upon the dark world.

Afterwards, as Hinata searched the main shrine ground ruins for her report to the Taisha, she found several small cloth bags.

-"Are these... some kinds of seeds?"

Each bag held a different variety of fine seeds.

Anzu began recalling memories as she spoke up.

-"... These are probably soba seeds. These are daikon seeds... And these ones are... cucumber? These things are in season, huh."

A farm field, seeds, and a hoe. All were here.

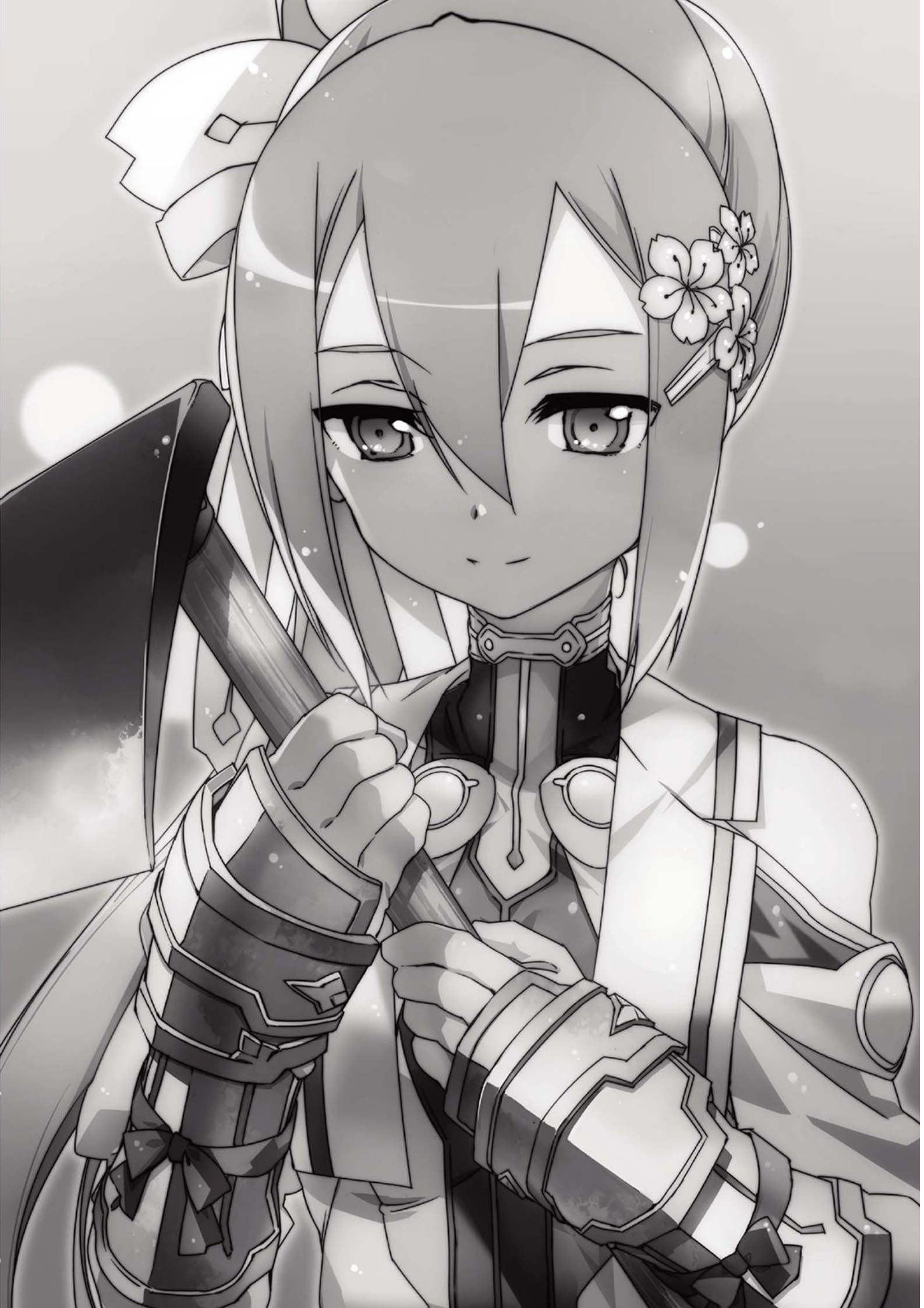
Without anyone saying a thing, the girls began to cultivate the farm field.

The sun had already set, and the girls faced the soil underneath the moonlight. Everyone pulled out weeds and alternated using Shiratori's hoe to plow through the soil.

They weren't used to the work, but nobody complained.

By the break of dawn, they had finished tilling part of the farm field.

They sowed seeds into the now soft soil.





It was unlikely that any seeds that sprouted would grow in a land swarming with Vertexes.

Nevertheless, they wanted to at least restore a little bit of what Shiratori had left behind back to how it was.

-"Let's take this hoe and the leftover seeds back to Shikoku."

Wakaba spoke in a somewhat lonely tone as they watched the morning sun illuminate the farm field.

Afterwards, the girls, tired from the long journey and the cultivation, slept for a short while beside the farm field.

After they woke up, the girls would go further on to Tokyo and the northern land...

Or at least that was the plan.

But their investigation expedition would be interrupted in an unexpected way.

As they woke up from their rest, a solemn Hinata informed them.

--Shikoku was at risk of a crisis once more.

(Chapter 11, End)

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME TWELVE!!
12

NOVEL



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）

執筆：朱白あおい　イラスト：BUNBUN　監修：Project 2H

ガーリッシュナンバー

著：渡 航

キャラクター原案・カラーイラスト：

QP:flapper

モノクロイラスト：やむ茶

［ DENGEKI G's NOVEL ］ 電撃G's magazine 2016年8月号付録 分売不可



I know it's meant to encourage everyone,

but each day, when I see the stream of [redacted] information,

it sends shivers down my spine.

Isn't that a sign of desperation?

Isn't the world beyond recovery now?

...No, now's not the time to complain.

We are heroes, after all.

Hero Record Mar 2019 AD

Nogi Wakaba's Record



第十二話
―忘種―

vol.12

Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JWWORKS
Supervision by Project 2H

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JWWORKS
監修／Project 2H

©2014 Project 2H



-"Thanks to the investigation of the heroes and miko, the Suwa area was confirmed to be safe. The Taisha is currently looking into methods of transporting goods and materials to the refugees of Suwa. There is a high possibility of human survival in places other than Suwa, and thus--"

In the cafeteria, Wakaba and the others listened to the stream of news from a portable TV placed on the table.

Today was the third day since their return to Shikoku from their investigation expedition. Everyone was about to eat udon for lunch today.

During the course of these three days, the mass media had been reporting their 'successful' investigation expedition on the TV and in newspapers.

-"Again with the lies. I was looking forward to udon, but this leaves a bad taste in my mouth."

Tamako placed her chopsticks on the table with a pout.

Just as she had said, the news spreading through Shikoku had been falsified by the Taisha: Suwa was safe. Humanity was surviving outside of Shikoku. Vertex numbers were decreasing. Humanity was taking back its territory... Nothing but things the people of Shikoku wanted to hear. The complete opposite of the truth Wakaba and the others had seen outside of Shikoku.

-"Manipulating information to maintain the morale of the people, huh... That definitely is a common sight in wars, but..."

Anzu darkly murmured.

(Strategically, the Taisha's methods make sense... but still...)

Wakaba couldn't shake her apprehension. Spread lies to the populace in order to forcibly boost morale-- Historically, many who used that tactic ended up losing in the long run, didn't they? Wakaba couldn't help but feel it was a tactic for those losing the war.

-"Guys, the udon's going to get stale if we just sit around watching the news! So in that case~ if it's just going to get stale otherwise, then I'll eat Tama-chan's meat udon!"

Yuuna reached her chopsticks out to Tamako's bowl and quickly took a bite.

-"Ah!! Yuna, you~! You took some of the meat too, didn't you!"

-"Well, I thought it'd be better if I ate it for you instead of you just letting it go to waste."

-"I was going to eat it! In that case, I'll take the tofu from your kitsune udon!"

-"Ahh! But there was only one of them in there!"

An udon war broke out between Yuuna and Tamako.

-"Mmgh..."

Tamako was silenced by Anzu's scolding.

-"That was rude of you too, Yuuna-san."

-"Yes ma'am."

Yuuna, on the other hand, was shamed by Hinata's warning.

Watching her friends like this put a wry smile on Wakaba's face. The dark atmosphere had dissipated before she had noticed.

Yuuna looked around at everyone and spoke up with a cheerful voice.

-"Well, you know! The news the Taisha people are spreading might be false now, but we just have to make it all true, right? Just gotta beat up all the Vertexes and reclaim the world!"

-"Yeah, Yuuna's exactly right."

Wakaba nodded and turned off the portable TV. There was no point in listening any further. That said, there was no doubt that the false information spread in the news was exactly what the people wanted to hear. And it was the heroes' duty to make that news a reality.

-"... Thanks for the food..."

Finished eating, Chikage placed her chopsticks beside her bowl as she stood up from the table. She had been eating her udon in silence without adding to the conversation.

She tidied up her tableware, and without making eye contact with anyone, she left the cafeteria.

After returning from the expedition, she had been even quieter than usual. Instead, her expression became more stern and she became less approachable.

-"Oh right, Tama's got stuff to do too."

Tamako also got up from the table.

-"Anzu, tell the teacher I'm going to be absent from afternoon class, okay!"

-"Huh? O-okay, but..."

-"I'm not playing hooky, okay?"

Tamako quickly tidied up her tableware and left the cafeteria.

Anzu anxiously watched as Tamako walked away.



After school-- Chikage kept swinging her hero weapon, a scythe, at the training grounds. Her weapon was large-- about as long as a full human height-- but it had become light in her hands throughout her experience in battle.

Nevertheless, Chikage's expression was grim as she swung her scythe. It was as if she were venting her anger.

-"Gun-chaaan!"

When she turned toward the cheerful voice, Chikage saw Yuuna running towards her from the training grounds entrance.

Yuuna stopped in front of her and spoke with just a little bit of displeasure.

-"You should've told me you were going to do some independent training. It's better to practice with a partner than to practice alone!"

-"It's independent training... so I'm doing it independently..."

-"Then I'll join you 'independently'!"

-"... okay..."

Chikage nodded, not giving a reason to refuse. If it were anyone besides Yuuna, she probably would have simply left the training grounds without a word.

The two of them practiced with a mock battle and then took a short break afterwards.

-"You've been doing independent training ever since we got back to Shikoku, huh Gun-chan?"

Yuuna looked at Chikage's face while drinking from a plastic water bottle. Something was stiff about Chikage's facial expression. Something strict.

-"It's because... we never know when the Vertexes could attack next..."

-"Hmm~ well, I guess you're right. According to Hina-chan's oracle, danger is imminent, but we don't know when exactly it'll happen..."

Hinata's oracle had told the heroes that danger was imminent upon Shikoku, and thus they cut the expedition short and returned.

However, neither Hinata, nor any of the Taisha's other miko had received any further oracles, and thus neither the timeframe nor the scale of the Vertex attack were known.

If there were more time before the enemy invasion, the heroes could have investigated a little more to the north. Not even the Taisha understood the reason for the oracle calling for an early return. Perhaps something unlike anything before was about to happen--

-"I... want to fight soon... I wish the Vertexes could just come already..."

Chikage slowly muttered.

-"Gun-chan?"

Chikage's odd choice of words prompted a worried gaze from Yuuna. Chikage looked down and stared hard at the ground.

-"The true value of a hero... is in fighting. In winning... That's what the people of Shikoku want too..."

-"..."

Yuuna listened silently to Chikage.

-"Look what the Vertexes did outside of Shikoku... I'll annihilate them all... Because otherwise, I'm worthless as a hero..."

-"Even if you're not fighting, I'm happy just to be with you, Gun-chan. You don't have to worry about difficult things like your 'worth' or anything."

Yuuna smiled.

Chikage looked back blankly for a second.

-"... I... don't really understand..."

And after muttering as such, she looked away.

By the time Tamako returned to the dorm, the sun had already set, and Anzu was standing in front of her door.

-"Oh, Anzu. What's up?"

-"..."

Anzu sent Tamako an inquisitive look.

Her serious face put some pressure on Tamako.

-"Wh-what...? Did Tama do something to make you mad? Ah, don't tell me... you found out how I slobbered all over that book I borrowed earlier!? I'm sorry! I fell asleep reading..."

-"Huh!? So that's why just one page was all warped when you returned it!?"

-"Oh, so that wasn't it!? Man, did I just screw up then!"



Tamako put her head in her arms.

-"Geez... Let's set the matter of the book aside for now. That's not it. ... Tamacchi-sempai, you're hiding something, aren't you?"

-"Hiding something...?"

Tamako faltered slightly at Anzu's pointed gaze.

-"Where did you go when you skipped classes this afternoon?"

-"..."

Tamako hesitated to speak.

-"You started looking pensive at times during the expedition, and you still do sometimes, Tamacchi-sempai..."

-"... No point in standing around talking. Let's just come inside my room for now."

Tamako opened the door and went in, followed by Anzu.

The room was littered with outdoor goods as always.

Tamako sat on a chair and Anzu sat on the bed.

-"I went to the hospital today."

-"The hospital?"

Anzu asked back dubiously.

-"Yeah, the Taisha-connected hospital. The place we always get checked up."

-"Did something happen?"

-"No... I'm not sick or injured or anything. It's just... ever since I used the fairy's power during the expedition, I guess? My body's been feeling kind of funny..."

Tamako's eyes wandered around the room as if she were searching for the right words. She couldn't quite explain what she was feeling.

After returning from the investigation expedition, all of the heroes had a check up. No abnormalities were found in any of them, and they were told that they were healthy.

I had them check me up again just in case. But still, no abnormalities were found.

-"Oh, is that it..."

Anzu sighed a breath of relief.

-"But I still do feel kinda funny... I just can't put it into words."

Tamako spoke in frustration as she brought her eyebrows up together in thought.

-"..."

Anzu's heart pounded.

These girls were experiencing things that hardly anyone had even known about throughout human history. Heroes were beings imbued with the power of the gods. Vertexes were unthinkable monsters. The situation outside the barrier was almost completely unknown. Even if no abnormalities came up in a hospital check up, that didn't necessarily mean they were perfectly fine.

-"Tamacchi-sempai. If anything happens... please don't force yourself, okay?"

Seeing the devastation of the outside world during the investigation expedition had made Anzu nervous. She couldn't help but feel anxiety.

-"Yeah, I know."

Tamako nodded meekly.

Meanwhile, Wakaba was sitting in her room in proper seiza position, deep in thought.

Such was Wakaba's style when she needed time to meditate. Normally, it'd be best to do so at a dojo, but Marugame Castle's lack of a dojo meant she had to use her room for silent meditation to clear her mind.

No Vertex attack had happened since the end of the investigation expedition, so for the time being, Wakaba dn the others had returned to their daily routine. But things weren't necessarily the same as they were before.

(There's a bad atmosphere brewing through the team right now...)

The sights they had seen throughout Japan were just too shocking. The actions the Taisha took after their return was dubious. As a result, the girls were getting irritated.

Furthermore, ever since they returned ot Shikoku, Chikage began talking less and her patience had been visibly wearing thin. Tamako would at times look like she was worried about something, and Anzu would get anxious seeing her like that as a result.

Yuuna's optimism was just barely keeping the team's mood in check... but things weren't looking very good.

(There has to be something I can do as leader.)



What would Hinata or Yuuna do in her position? Thinking on that angle suddenly gave Wakaba an idea.

Back during their hot spring trip at the beginning of the year, the girls played some simple games and had a fun time. It would be for the best if she could recreate that peaceful mood.

-"Games... recreation... Sounds like it could work."

Wakaba slowly muttered to herself and opened her eyes.

-"Recreation, is it? What do you plan on doing?"

Before Wakaba had realized it, Hinata was in her room, watching over her with a smile on her face.

-"H-Hinata!? Why are you here!? When did you get here!? How did you get here!?

"You looked like you were in deep thought, so I sneaked in quietly so as to not disturb you. With stealthy, light steps. You did give me a duplicate room key after all, Wakaba-chan."

It appeared Wakaba had been concentrating so hard that she was unable to notice such a small presence and sound.

-"Don't give me a heart attack. Just come inside normally..."

-"Please, don't mind the small details. So, what's wrong, Wakaba-chan? After meditating for a while, you suddenly bring up something like recreation."

-"I got caught up in those 'small details'... Right now, there's a somewhat unpleasant mood among us all. You've noticed it too, haven't you, Hinata?"

-"... Yes, you're right."

Hinata nodded, a serious expression now on her face as well.

-"So I was thinking maybe it'd be for the best if we all did something fun together for a change of pace."

-"...!"

Hinata's eyes popped in surprise.

-"Wh... what? Why do you look so surprised?"

-"No, it's just, I never thought I'd hear -you- suggest we have fun, Wakaba-chan..."

-"... Well, I guess you're right."

Back when Wakaba had neglected to build teamwork, perhaps she wouldn't have thought of improving the team's mood. It would've been even more of a stretch to think she would have chosen to have "fun".

-"You really have changed, Wakaba-chan. Changed for the better, I'd say."

Wakaba felt a little embarrassed as Hinata smiled at her.

-"That said, exactly what sort of recreation do you want to do?"

-"Well, I was thinking of something that would get everyone excited, yet at the same time work as practice."

Wakaba's suggestion was for all the heroes to participate in a battle royale sort of mock battle. The entirety of the Marugame Castle grounds would serve as the battlefield. As grand prize, the last one standing would be allowed to order the other members to do whatever they wanted. The losers would have to abide by the winner's command.

It was a Battle Royal x Osama Game fusion event.

-"A mock battle for recreation, hmm? Sounds like something you'd suggest, Wakaba-chan."

Hinata smiled wryly.

-"And as a rule, everyone should be allowed to do anything, with the exception of using trump cards. Real hero weapons are allowed."

Wakaba gripped her beloved sword as she spoke.

-"... That's a big no-no, Wakaba-chan. What if someone gets hurt!?"

-"But if we don't do that then there won't be any air of tension..."

-"Please use mock weapons.

-"... No, but..."

-"No buts."

-"... okay."

Despite having that discussion, since the battle royale would be for practice, they obtained permission from the teachers and the event was settled.

The next afternoon. The battle begun.

From the highest castle tower window, Hinata looked down upon the grounds through binoculars. She could see the heroes scattered throughout the Marugame Castle grounds.



Marugame Castle Outer Citadel--

Chikage watched from the bushes as the battle unfolded before her eyes.

The two combatants she saw were Wakaba and Yuuna.

Both had taken martial arts training from a young age, and thus they excelled in battle ability.

They were the top two picks to win this battle royale.

-"Yuuna, I've been wanting to fight all out with you."

-"Same here. I'm not pulling any punches, okay!?"

Wakaba's weapon was a wooden sword reinforced in strength and weight by an iron core. She also had a scabbard as it was essential to performing iai techniques.

Yuuna's weapon was iron tekko gauntlets, but with the metal wrapped in cloth so as to avoid inflicting serious injury.

Players would retire if they themselves admitted defeat, or if they were hit by an attack that would have been fatal had they been using real weapons.

(...)

Chikage took a deep breath and watched the two fight.

Her plan-- Hide out the early battle and wait for the others to eliminate each other. By the time only one or two remained, they would presumably be fatigued. Unburdened by such a disadvantage, there would be no way for Chikage to lose.

(Nogi-san and Takashima-san are both formidable enemies... So it'd be a blessing for either of them to be retired...)

Yuuna and Wakaba exchanged serious glances.

Wakaba placed her hand on her wooden scabbard.

-"Victory to those who take initiative!"

In an instant, Yuuna closed the gap between them with a thrusting strike.

However, with flawless timing, Wakaba unsheathed her wooden blade in sync with Yuuna's attack. Yuuna's fist and Wakaba's wooden blade struck each other with a heavy thud.

-"Haaaaaahhh!"

-"Hwooooohhh!"





Blade and fist crossed again and again. They were evenly matched. Since Yuuna was able to attack with both fists, she was able to dole out a higher number of punches. However, each of Wakaba's individual hits dealt more damage.

-"Teyahh!"

Yuuna's fist knocked away Wakaba's wooden blade.

-"Khh!?"

-"This ends it!!"

Yuuna threw a finishing blow-- but before it could connect, Wakaba switched hands with her scabbard and swung it at Yuuna's torso.

-"Uwah!?"

Caught off guard, Yuuna quickly guarded with her left arm, blocking the scabbard attack. However, the sheer might of the throw knocked Yuuna back.

Wakaba had previously used her scabbard offensively against an evolved Vertex. The sword is not the only weapon in swordsmanship.

Wakaba tried to keep putting the pressure on Yuuna with close-range attacks, but she was interrupted by none other than Chikage.

-"I won't let you...!"

Chikage swung her dull practice scythe at Wakaba. Wakaba dodged at just a hair's breadth. Regardless, she was interrupted from attacking Yuuna.

(I intended to keep hidden until one of them retired, but... I just couldn't help myself when I saw Takashima-san in danger...)

Chikage horribly regretted her brashness.

-"Thanks, Gun-chan. You're a lifesaver!"

Yuuna smiled at Chikage.

-"No... don't mention it..."

Chikage no longer regretted her decision.

In the meantime, Wakaba picked up the wooden blade that Yuuna had knocked away.

-"Let's start over."

Wakaba resheathed her wooden blade and faced Yuuna and Chikage.

-"But it's two against one... You don't... have a chance..."

-"Nope, make that three against one."

Perhaps drawn by the sound of clashing weapons, Tamako showed up at the outer citadel as well.

Tamako had determined that the most formidable enemy in this battle was Wakaba. Though Wakaba and Yuuna were close power-wise, personality-wise, Yuuna would not go at full strength in a battle "between friends". Wakaba, on the other hand, would probably not have any qualms going at full strength. In that case, the three of them should first take out Wakaba.

-"Fine... Come at me, you three. Iaido has several proposed forms for one-vs-many combat. Allow me to show you the true strength of Iai."

Wakaba lowered her stance and touched the handle of her sheathed wooden blade.

Yuuna, Chikage, and Tamako each readied their stance as well.

The three-vs-one fight would be over in a mere matter of seconds.

Yuuna, Chikage, and Tamako all began to attack Wakaba at once.

First, Chikage jumped up for a downward swing of her scythe, but Wakaba cut her down with a single counter swipe. Koori Chikage: Retired

-"Gun-cha--"

Yuuna froze for just one moment out of concern for Chikage. Wakaba used that opening to smoothly transition from her first strike and cut down Yuuna. Takashima Yuuna: Retired

Immediately, Tamako came to a decision. Realizing she couldn't win a one-on-one confrontation with Wakaba, she slammed on the brakes, made an about-face, and ran for it.

-"Tamako!? Don't run away!"

-"Retreating is just another tactic!"

Tamako jumped down from the stone wall and into the cover of the woods.

Wakaba stood on the roof of the castle tower in search of Tamako.

As Hinata watched the battle progress with her binoculars through the third story window, Wakaba asked her a question.

-"Hinata, who's left?"

-"Just you and Tamako-san."

-"Anzu retired?"



-"Yes. She lost to Tamako-san before Chikage-san and Yuuna-san were eliminated."

(Then I only need to defeat Tamako now, huh...)

If she avoided any long distance attacks and brought the battle into close-range combat, there would be no way she could lose to Tamako. Wakaba's sword had the advantage over Tamako's bladed yo-yo in terms of close combat power.

Suddenly, the bladed yo-yo flew out from the trees underneath the castle tower, straight towards Wakaba.

Since she was vigilant about her surroundings, Wakaba was not taken off guard. Wakaba easily dodged the bladed yo-yo attack and leapt towards the direction the attack came from.

And there... Tamako stood from atop a tree branch.

-"Oh crap!"

Tamako tried to bring the bladed yo-yo back to her grasp, but she was too late. Before the yo-yo returned, Wakaba closed the distance to Tamako, unsheathed her wooden blade and cut--

-"!?"

--but before she could land a strike, a well-aimed arrow struck Wakaba on her right hand. Since the arrow was covered with a soft rubber guard, it didn't pierce the skin, but the impact caused her to drop her wooden blade. In a flash, a second arrow struck her scabbard, causing her to drop it to the ground as well.

-"Arrows...!? But I thought Anzu retired already...!?"

Before she could get an answer, Tamako's recalled bladed yo-yo struck Wakaba in the back and fell to the ground.

Afterwards.

Wakaba had fallen to the ground, tied up in Tamako's bladed yo-yo wire, completely immobilized.

Anzu and Tamako stood before the bound Wakaba as Anzu pointed her crossbow at her.

-"Khh... But I heard Anzu retired earlier..."

-"I had Hinata-san agree to help me out. I requested she say I retired earlier if anyone asked."

-"Wha...!?"

Meanwhile, in the Marugame Castle Tower, Hinata murmured apologetically.

-"I'm sorry, Wakaba-chan... It was tough having to lie to you... but I wasn't exactly a referee to begin with, so nobody ever said I was obligated to give out truthful information..."

Hinata looked at the smartphone she held in her hand. On the screen was a picture of Wakaba doing combat training during lessons yesterday. Normally during hero training sessions, Hinata would undergo miko training in another room, and thus she had no opportunities to take pictures of Wakaba training... As such, this particular picture was Anzu's payment in return for her cooperation.

-"Now my treasured Wakaba picture collection is one step closer to completion."

-"... I admit defeat. Finish me off."

Wakaba graciously admitted defeat.

-"Our tama-teamwork was a success!"

Tamako puffed out her chest in pride. Running away from Wakaba was just another link in their chain of tactics. Tamako and Anzu had teamed up from the start. Tamako would bait the enemies; Anzu would use the opening to take them out with her crossbow. That was the plan they had decided upon.

-"So, Wakaba-san... This is the end."

Anzu slowly pulled her crossbow's trigger.

But the arrow didn't hit Wakaba.

-"Ow!!?"

Instead, it slammed into Tamako's forehead.

--"... huh?"

Wakaba and Tamako blinked in confusion simultaneously.

Anzu smiled and said,

-"There, now Tamacchi-sempai is retired too. Wakaba-san admitted defeat earlier, so that counts as a retire. I win."

--"... huhhhh!?"

Apparently Wakaba was not the only one who Anzu fooled.

-"The threat who should've been top priority... was Anzu..."

Tamako muttered with drooping shoulders.

And thus, the first mock battle royale ended with Iyojima Anzu as the winner.

As winner, she had the privilege of ordering the other heroes, but--



-"Tamako, be mine..."

-"W-Wakaba-kun... I'm sorry, but there's someone else that Tama likes..."

-"Hold it right there, Wakaba-kun! You're disturbing Tamako-san!"

-"Oh, Takashima-kun... Wait, what the hell is this!?"

-"Cut, cut! That's no good, Tamacchi-sempai! You need to say your lines properly!"

In the classroom, Wakaba had driven Tamako to the wall, blocking her escape with her arm as she whispered sweet words into Tamako's ear-- the classic "kabe-don". And then Yuuna came in the middle to separate the two of them... the classic love triangle.

Anzu was recreating one of her favorite scenes from a romance novel using Wakaba, Tamako, and Yuuna as actors.

-"I can't say such embarrassing lines! Hell! Why does Tama even have to play the role of a 'quiet, timid girl'!?"

-"Because part of this heroine's character is that she's short. So I thought it might be the perfect role for you, Tamacchi-sempai."

-"You calling Tama short!?"

-"While we're at it, why do I have to wear male clothes..."

-"Me too... it feels kinda... strange to wear a boy's uniform."

Wakaba and Yuuna were wearing male uniforms.

-"It's to increase the level of accuracy, obviously!"

Anzu was a strict director.

Incidentally, Hinata was appreciating Wakaba, Yuuna, and Tamako's performances with a warm smile on her face. And it goes without saying, but she didn't forget to snap pictures of the situation with her smartphone.

-"A-anyway! I did exactly as you wanted, Anzu! We're done fulfilling your command, aren't we!?"

-"Can I... stop here too?"

Tamako shouted with a flushed face. Wakaba hunched over in exhaustion.

-"It was fun, but it really is kinda embarrassing, huh."

Yuuna spoke in embarrassment as well.



-"Well, it was a little lacking in accuracy, but let's leave it at that. Now then, next..."

Anzu's eyes turned toward Chikage.

Chikage's body twitched and shuddered.

-"I have to do... something that embarrassing too...? ... P-please... no...!"

-"Heh heh heh heh heh. Now what sort of role would suit Chikage-san the best?"

A wicked smile spread across Anzu's face.

-"Ugh..."

Chikage stiffened.

But Anzu shook her head side to side.

-"Chikage-san, I'll give you a different command."

-"Huh...?"

When Chikage looked at her dubiously, Anzu took out a white sheet of paper from the teacher's desk and held it out to Chikage. Written on the sheet was "Diploma　Third Year　Koori Chikage".

-"My command is for you to accept this."

-"This is..."

Chikage looked at the diploma in confusion.

Yuuna smiled and said,

-"If you think about it, you're a third year, so you really should be graduating now, right, Gun-chan? So we made this diploma for you."

Since they all took lessons in the same classroom, none of them were really conscious about it, but Chikage was a third year middle school student. In a normal school, it would be just about time for her graduation ceremony.

-"That said, though you'll be moving on to your first year of high school, you won't actually be going to a new school."

Tamako spoke with a wry smile on her face. Since this school was established as a way to gather all of the heroes in the same place, their physical school wouldn't change even once they moved on to high school.

-"But still, it's best we do this at least for formality's sake."

-"Yes, I agree."

Wakaba and Hinata nodded.

Since she wasn't changing schools, "graduation" had felt meaningless to Chikage, and thus she herself had forgotten about it.

But still--

-"... If it's a command, I guess I've got no choice..."

And with that, Chikage took the diploma.

The girls started walking back to the dorm as the sun set.

-"Dammit, I would've won that mock battle royale if I didn't let Anzu trick me!"

-"But Tamacchi-sempai, I think you would've lost to Wakaba-san if you fought her alone."

-"What was that!?"

-"Yuuna, next time, come at me at your full strength."

-"Huh? But I did come at you at full strength!"

-"No, your movements were clearly weaker compared to when you fight against Vertexes."

-"Next time... I won't lose..."

-"Chikage-san, if you had kept yourself hidden while Yuuna-san was fighting, you might have won... You did have tactics that would oppose Anzu, after all."

The girls spoke in high spirits as they walked.

-"Let's make another opportunity to have fun together like this again soon."

Everyone nodded to Wakaba's words.

The view of the Seto Insland Sea from Marugame Castle was as peaceful as ever.

The next Vertex invasion had yet to happen.

(Chapter 12 End)

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME THIRTEEN!!
13

NOVEL



乃木若葉は勇者である

ガーリッシュナンバー

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）

執筆：朱白あおい　イラスト：BUNBUN　監修：Project 2H

著：渡 航

キャラクター原案・カラーイラスト：QP:flapper

モノクロイラスト：やむ茶

CONTENTS

003
乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

026
ガーリッシュナンバー

著：渡 航
キャラクター原案・カラーイラスト：QP:flapper
モノクロイラスト：やむ茶

DENGEKI G's NOVEL

電撃G's magazine 2016年9月号付録②
［ DENGEKI G's NOVEL ］



Great power comes at a great cost.

As they use the power of the fairies,

trump cards could possibly cause a buildup of [redacted] in the heroes' bodies.

Hero Record Apr 2019 AD

Iyojima Anzu's Record

第十三話
―落花―



vol.13

Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JWWORKS
Supervision by Project 2H

企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JWWORKS
監修／Project 2H

乃木若葉は勇者である

©2014 Project 2H



The technique we call the "trump card" is thought to be inherently related to a certain kind of necromancy.

It imbues the human body with an inhuman entity. So far, we have summoned the following fairies: Yuuna-san's Ichimokuren, Chikage-san's Shichinin Misaki, Tamacchi-sempai's Wanyudo, and Wakaba-san's Yoshitsune. Each of them has aspects of demons or vengeful spirit. Yoshitsune is renowned as a hero, but there are also legends of him becoming a vengeful spirit, cursing his elder brother Yoritomo to death.

Supernatural phenomena like séances and spirit possession have existed in human culture from time immemorial. Shamans. Blind spirit mediums. Animists. Polytheists. Such practitioners would evoke the inhuman into their own bodies. There are also phenomena of inugami or kitsune possession. Each with their own dangers. Inugami and kitsune possession were said to be curses.

The boundary between human and inhuman sometimes becomes blurred. In Japanese mythology, the Chibiki no Ishi (Thousand-Lugged Stone) placed at Yomotsu Hirasaka is known as one such boundary. Using the trump card is akin to soaking half your body beyond the boundary, and thus--

Anzu thought to herself at her desk in her room as she scribbled things like "Fairies = vengeful spirits? Dangers of the trump card" in her notebook. She had been studying for mathematics, but ended up getting distracted. She was worried about the other day when Tamako said something felt weird about her body.

Apparently Tamako had been feeling some discomfort ever since her second trump card use.

(We have been told that the trump card was dangerous...)

"Heyyyy! Anzuuu!"

As if to interrupt Anzu's thoughts, the door suddenly opened and Tamako entered the room. Anzu closed her notebook in a hurry.

"Oh, you're studying?"

"No, I was just about done. I thought it was about time I went to sleep."

Anzu tried to pretend everything was normal as she shook her head. She didn't want to say anything to agitate Tamako's anxiety.

"Oh, okay. Then Tama's gonna sleep with you too!"

"Tamacchi-sempai, I think you're just about the only one who can eagerly announce they're going to sleep like that."

Anzu smiled wryly.

The two girls got in bed together and turned off the lights.

The bed was only sized to accomodate one person, but since Tamako was small, they were able to sleep together by squeezing up next to each other.

This way they looked like real family. They were often told they looked like sisters. Neither Anzu nor Tamako were displeased to hear it.

"Anzu, if you and Tama were sisters, then that'd make Tama the big sister."

"Hmm, you sure, Tamacchi-sempai? I'm taller than you, so maybe I'd be the big sister."

"What!? Tama's the sempai, so she's the big sister, duh!"

"But we're the same age."

"No, but Tama's more big sister-y! Anzu's the little sister!"

Anzu chuckled as Tamako's childish words and demeanor belied her assertion of being the elder sister. That said, Anzu honestly didn't believe herself to be the elder sister figure either.

"Yeah, you're right. I think I'm the little sister too. You're the big sister, Tamacchi-sempai."

"I know, right! Okay, now that that's settled, why don't we become sisters for real?"

Tamako hugged Anzu. Anzu hugged tightly back.

"Ahahah, yeah. I'm sure we'll get along great as sisters."

"Yeah, I know we'll be better than any other sisters in the whole world."

Tamako nodded in satisfaction. But her expression soon clouded over.

"But... what I don't know is how our next battle with the Vertexes will go..."

Just the other day, Hinata had received a new oracle. The first oracle since the heroes had returned from their expedition outside of Shikoku. According to the oracle, the next Vertex attack would soon occur. The enemy numbers would apparently be less than what was seen in the previous "Battle of Marugame Castle". However-- the circumstances would be unprecedented.

"Unprecedented circumstances? But each battle's been unprecedented."

"Yeah... but I feel there must be some sort of meaning behind dedicating an oracle about it..."

Anzu spoke with a heavy voice.

The oracle had spread an air of anxiety and unrest among the heroes these past few days. Chikage was even more on edge than usual, and Wakaba seemed tense.



"Man, it's April already and yet the mood's just not right for flower viewing."

"True. It's such a pity seeing as how the sakura blossoms are so beautiful around Marugame Castle."

Marugame Castle was a famous sakura viewing location. Now that April had come along, the seven hundred sakura trees of Kameyama Park within the castle grounds were beautifully in bloom.

"Let's sweep away those pesky Vertexes and go view the hell out of those flowers! It'd be too much to tama take if we just let all those petals fall."

"Yeah. But if we're going to go flower viewing, we need to prepare a picnic. What should we make?"

"Anzu, you can cook?"

"As long as it's something simple. If we're going to go flower viewing, we might as well prepare something ourselves rather than get something ready-made."

"Alrighty! In that case, Tama will catch fish in the nearby river and cut out their little tama tummies! I'll show you the deliciousness of freshly cooked fish!"

"Somehow that doesn't seem quite right for flower viewing..."

"But why not? It's fun."

"Yeah."

Anzu nodded with a smile.

In the classroom the next day, Tamako and Anzu discussed holding a flower viewing party with the others.

"Sounds fun! Let's do it! Let's do it!"

"Yes, that sounds good. We simply cannot stay in Marugame Castle and NOT go flower viewing."

Yuuna and Anzu seemed on-board. Wakaba nodded too, saying "Not bad. Sounds like a good way to relax."

"But... we don't know when the Vertexes are coming... Is it really okay for us... to let our guard down like that...?"

Chikage objected.

But Yuuna simply pinched Chikage's cheeks to make her relax her tensed face.

"L-lleggo mah heeks..."

"Gun-chan, you look too serious. What's wrong with a little flower viewing!? I wanna go flower viewing with you, Gun-chan."

Yuuna said that before letting go of Chikage's cheeks.

"... Well, if you say so, Takashima-san..."

Chikage nodded in resignation as she rubbed her reddened cheeks.

"Okay, then once our next Vertex battle's over, let's go flower viewing to celebrate!! I suddenly feel pumped up!"

Tamako cheerfully raised her hands in the air.

Planning a victory celebration before the battle might seem hasty, but victory was the only option afforded to the heroes either way.

Anzu gazed outside the classroom window down below to the sakura trees blooming in the Marugame Castle grounds.

"Hopefully we can go flower viewing soon..."

For flowers' lives are short.

So before they fall--

That evening. The forestization warning sound rang from the heroes' smartphones.

As they donned their battle garments, the heroes stood upon the vegetation-covered land of Shikoku. From beyond the Seto Inland Sea-- from outside the barrier, they say the Vertexes advance.

"Oh, seems kinda wimpy for 'unprecedented circumstances'."

Tamako slumped her shoulders at the anticlimactic turn of events.

The enemies probably numbered less than a thousand. The heroes had claimed victory against larger numbers in the "Battle of Marugame Castle".

"Don't let your guard down, Tamako. It's easy to slip up while under a false sense of security."
"Yeah yeah. You gotta lighten up, Wakaba."

Despite her lax demeanor, Tamako held her bladed yo-yo close.



Yuuna gripped her tekko and Chikage readied her scythe. As everyone prepared for battle, Anzu spoke up.

"Umm! Everyone, please listen!"

All the heroes turned their attention towards Anzu.

"What's wrong...?"

Chikage sent her a quizzical gaze.

Anzu responded with a serious look on her face.

"Let's not use trump cards this time."

"Okay... but why...?"

Chikage looked at Anzu somewhat confused.

"The Taisha have already told us to avoid using the power of the fairies... so there might really be a risk associated with them."

"... But depending on the circumstances, we might have no choice but to use them... you know..." Anzu couldn't object to Chikage's reasoning.

The fact of the matter was that in all of their battles so far, defeating an evolved Vertex often required relying on the power of the fairies. There was no guarantee the enemy wouldn't evolve this fight, and thus there was no guarantee the heroes could fight without using trump cards--

"But I think An-chan's right. We'd be better off not using them. You know what they say. A wise guy keeps away from danger!"

Yuuna nodded vigorously.

A faintly wry smile formed upon Wakaba's lips as she said

"You mean a wise man, right?"

"Oh, was that it?"

"Anyway, Anzu has a point. Let's avoid using trump cards as much as we can this time."

"..."

After Wakaba and Yuuna agreed with Anzu, Chikage had nothing more to say.

"More importantly, the enemy's coming, guys!"

Tamako's words brought everyone's attention back to the swarming Vertexes.

Anzu and Tamako worked in tandem to face off against the Vertex horde. Anzu shot down the enemies with precise marksmanship while Tamako cleaved down the enemies with her bladed yo-yo.

As they fought, Anzu looked about their surroundings. As usual, Wakaba was exterminating Vertexes with relentless strength. Yuuna was fighting recklessly as well, and Chikage was destroying enemies with an even more bloodcurdling intensity than before.

Fighting common Vertexes had become second nature to the heroes. They had fought against countless hordes of Vertexes to protect Shikoku already. Not even a thousand of them would be any trouble.

Anzu cautiously observed the enemies' movements. If she spotted any Vertexes threatening to fuse, she shot them down immediately with her crossbow. She would not allow them any time to fuse into an evolved form. It was a strategy well-suited for a long-range specialist like Anzu.

(We should be fine as long as we don't let them fuse...!)

Anzu fought with that prayer in mind.

If any evolved Vertexes were to appear, Tamako would surely use the power of the fairies to fight it. As they had seen in the expedition outside of Shikoku, Tamako was the type who gave into the momentum too easily. She had little restraint to using trump cards.

Anzu didn't want to let Tamako use trump cards. She was unsure if the power of the fairies did in fact have a negative influence, but if there was even the smallest possibility that were the case, then Anzu didn't want to expose Tamako to that risk.

But Anzu's prayers were left unanswered.

Nearly a hundred Vertexes began gathering at the same place.

"Oh no...!"

Anzu fired her crossbow, but even though she shot down several of the fusing Vertexes, she could not fell all of them. Since the other heroes were too far away, their attacks wouldn't reach.

The vertexes fused--

"We got no choice! I'm gonna use a trump card!"

"Wait! I'll do it!"

Anzu shouted for Tamako to stop and then closed her eyes and focused her concentration within herself.

The heroes had a spiritual connection to the Shinju. Anzu traced that connection back to call forth the power of the fairies from the Shinju and imbue it within herself.



The fairy Anzu imbued within herself-- Yukijoro (the snow woman).

An embodiment of all-freezing snow and cold. A symbol of death.

Enveloped in the power of the fairy, Anzu's hero garments transformed.

"Tamacchi-sempai, please stay put. I'll take these guys down myself...!"

Anzu raised her crossbow to the sky, shooting out not arrows, but multitudes of white particles.

Or rather, particles of snow. The crossbow snow blotted out the sky.

And not a moment later, the snow became a blizzard. The relentless cold and the furious flurry rained down over the forestized Marugame City in its entirety.

"S-so cold!!!!"

Tamako's shouting echoed in the snow storm.

"An-chaaaan!? What's with the blizzard~~?"

"There's zero visibility! We can't see either friend or foe!"

"It's... cold..."

The voices of Anzu's teammates echoed in the snow storm's blinding whiteness.

"Please stay still everyone! It's too dangerous to move! I'll sweep up all the enemies! Leave it to me!"

The power of Anzu's Yukijoro was to cover a wide-reaching area in intense cold. If it weren't for their hero clothes, the other heroes would not have been able to withstand the cold either. They would likely have frozen to death in mere seconds.

Conversely, the merciless cold would freeze the Vertexes.

After a few minutes, the blizzard finally settled. When visibility cleared up, just about all of the Vertexes had been frozen solid, including the dozens that were trying to fuse, right before they could complete their evolved form.

One by one, the frozen Vertexes fell to the ground, shattering along with the ice. Few Vertexes had escaped becoming frozen.

"Ohh, pretty nice... Anzu."

Tamako muttered in blank surprise at the majesty of Anzu's attack.

"Way to go, An-chaaan! There are only a few enemies left now!"

Yuuna started beating up the surviving Vertexes.

Wakaba and Chikage likewise swung their weapons to sweep up the remaining enemy forces.

"But Anzu, you said not to use trump cards! Are you sure you're okay!?"

Wakaba shouted to Anzu as she swung her sword.

"Ah, yeah, that's right, Anzu! You said it was dangerous..."

Tamako scolded Anzu out of worry as well.

"Umm, I'm okay, probably... That was my first time using fairy power after all. It was safer for me to have used it than anyone else."

Anzu replied with some risky reasoning. There was no proof that fewer uses meant lesser risk, but it was better than risking Tamako use it considering she had already displayed irregularities. To prevent the others from using trump cards, Anzu had to use one herself.

"Well, whatever. Lecturing can come later! Right now we need to take care of the remaining--"

Right as Tamako spoke, she turned towards the Seto Inland Sea.

And there, beyond the barrier, she saw something bizarre.

A Vertex horde-- incoming reinforcements. But most conspicuous out of the whole group was what was spearheading the flock of common Vertexes: a giant monster. It was most likely an evolved Vertex, but they hadn't seen anything of that scale since the incomplete evolved Vertex that appeared in the final minutes of the "Battle of Marugame Castle".

"... That doesn't look good..."

Even the optimistic Tamako turned pale at the sight of that evolved Vertex. Just a single look was enough to tell that it was on a whole new level compared to the enemies they had fought before. The other heroes began to take precautions about the giant Vertex. They began to question whether or not they should commence an attack.

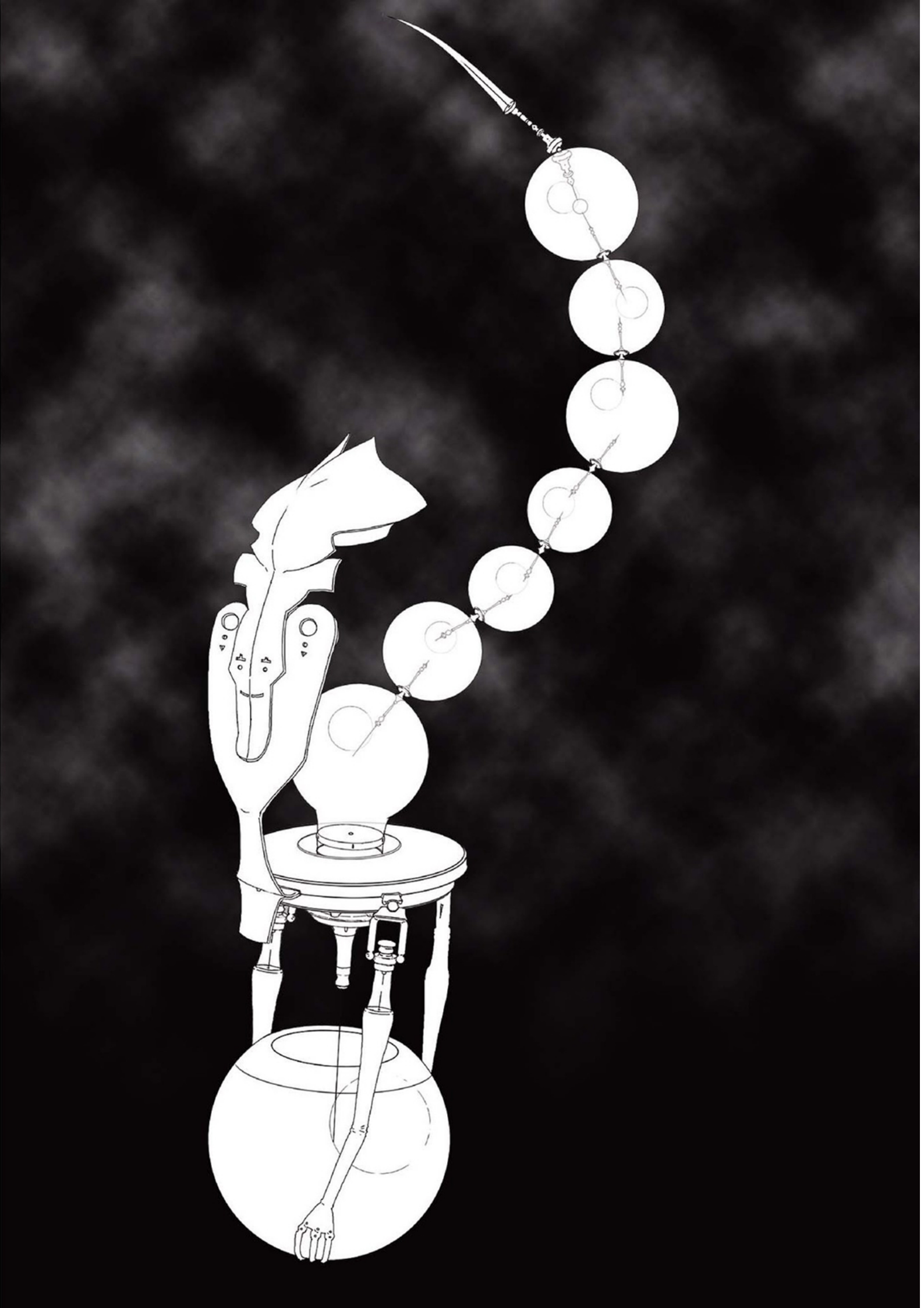
"It kinda looks like... a giant shrimp, doesn't it...?"

"I think it's more like a scorpion... Takashima-san..."

The monster had an abdomen containing an ominous liquid, An organ resembling a scorpion tail, complete with a giant needle.

Imbued with Yukijoro's power, Anzu kicked off the ground and leapt towards the scorpion-type Vertex. She then turned her crossbow towards it.

"Freeze!"



The snow and fierce cold shot from the crossbow towards the giant Vertex. This time, the attack wasn't wide-reaching, but rather focused on one point, and was thus much more intense. Several common Vertexes that were near the scorpion were frozen by the sheer cold of the shockwaves and shatttered.

However--

The scorpion-type Vertex was completely unaffected. Its body was merely coated in snow, its body unfrozen.

"No way...!"

Shock spread across Anzu's face.

The next moment, the scorpion's tail swung down at Anzu, its sharp needle threatening to skewer the girl.

"Wah!?"

Anzu dodged by a hair's breadth, jumping backwards to distance herself rom the enemy.

(The fairy's power was ineffective...? Then how do we...!?)

In the meantime, other common Vertexes began to fuse.

Tamako, Wakaba, Yuuna, and Chikage were each about to be attacked by evolved Vertexes, albeit ones smaller than the scorpion-type.

"Khh...!"

"This is bad, Wakaba-chan! If this many evolve at once...!"

Wakaba and Yuuna fought desperately, but the situation was clearly unfavorable.

"I'll use... a trump card...!"

The quickest to make that decision was Chikage.

"Please wait, Chikage-san!!"

Ignoring Anzu's call for her to stop, Chikage activated a trump card. Chikage's hero garments transformed and she appeared in seven places at once. It was the power of the Shichinin Misaki. At that signal, the other girls began activating trump cards one by one.

"You have to adapt to circumstances. There's no time to hesitate!"

"... Yeah!"

Wakaba and Yuuna imbued their bodies with Yoshitsune and Ichimokuren respectively.



(Ahh... so in the end, everyone ended up using the power of the fairies...)

As she watched the sight of the heroes using trump cards one after the other, Anzu regretted her own power insufficiency. If only she were stronger, the others wouldn't have had to use trump cards--

"Anzu, look out!"

"!?"

Tamako's voice snapped Anzu back to her senses. She looked up to find the Vertex scorpion tail coming right at her. She couldn't dodge it--

Not a moment too soon, Tamako came to her rescue, riding her bladed yo-yo super-sized by Wanyudo. Tamako took Anzu by the hand and pulled her on board.

But though they had avoided a direct hit, the tip of the tail needle grazed Anzu's left arm.

"!?"

"Anzu, are you hurt!?"

Anzu shook her head to ease Tamako's worries.

"It's just a scratch... huh?"

She was only lightly grazed, but the area around her wound was red and swollen. Her entire left arm had gone numb and lost sensation.

Tamako looked at Anzu's arm as she steered the bladed yo-yo away from the giant Vertex.

"Anzu, your arm..."

"... That Vertex's needle... is venomous..."

"Khh... damn it...!"

Tamako glared at the scorpion-type Vertex.

But Anzu refused to show any weakness. She gripped her crossbow tight in her right hand and said;

"My right arm is fine, so I can still fight!"

"... Okay. Then let's get this fight over quickly so we can patch you up!"

Tamako then gazed at the scorpion-type Vertex. As if it had its sights set on Anzu and Tamako as well, the scorpion swung its tail needle at the bladed yo-yo.

"Offense is the greatest defense! Anzu, let's double team it!"

"Yeah!"

Yukijoro and Wanyudo. Ice and fire. The cold by itself was ineffective, but this Vertex could possibly be weak to fire, or an extreme temperature change could possibly damage it.

The bladed yo-yo approached the scorpion, slipping past the incoming tail needle. Anzu fired a blizzard at the scorpion-type Vertex. Tamako then kept ramming the giant flaming yo-yo at the same spot hit by the blizzard.

"Gooooo!!"

"Please work---!"

Despite their desperate cries, their combination attack merely scratched the Vertex's body. The Vertex shook off the bladed yo-yo with a whip of its tail, forcing the two to fall back once more.

"It didn't work at all!"

Tamako's Wanyudo had the most power out of the heroes' trump cards due to the sheer size it made her bladed yo-yo. If that wasn't enough to work, then even if they combined all of the other heroes' trump cards together, it still wouldn't be of any use.

In other words, this scorpion-type Vertex had more stamina than all of the heroes currently had the power to combat.

Nobody had expected this situation. Perhaps not even the Taisha.

Despair spread throughout Anzu's heart.

The next moment, the Vertex's giant tail struck Anzu and Tamako. A shock ran through their bodies as if they had been hit by a truck. The fairy enhancement subsided as Anzu and Tamako fell from the sky.

"Tamako! Anzu!"

Wakaba went to save Anzu and Tamako after they had taken a hit from the scorpion Vertex. Imbued with the power of Yoshitsune, Wakaba had the hasso tobi ability, allowing her to quickly reach them--

But several evolved Vertexes stood in her way.

It would be simple to defeat just one of them, but not when they outnumbered her.

"Khh....!"

She looked around to see Yuuna and Chikage both fighting several evolved Vertexes of their own.

They couldn't mobilize easily in this situation.



Anzu had lost consciousness when she struck the ground.

"Anzu!! Wake up!"

Tamako called out to her, but she wouldn't open her eyes.

"Dammit...!"

The scorpion-type Vertex hadn't lost sight of them. It approached them with its sights set and swung down its tail once more.

"Damn ittttt!"

Without Wanyudo's power, Tamako could only transform her normal-sized bladed yo-yo into shield form to defend against the tail needle.

"Ghh, uughh...!"

The giant Vertex's attack was intense, nearly blowing her back. But it wasn't satisfied with just one attack. It relentlessly stabbed with its tail needle over and over again. It was filled with the simple tenacity to kill.

Clang!

Clang!!

Clang!!!

"Ughhhhh...!"

With each intense blow, Tamako clenched her teeth and steeled her feet to bear it.

Clang!

Clang! Clang!! Clang!!!

"Uuuuaaaaahh...!!"

With every blocked blow, Tamako felt as if every bone in her body was shattering. Her feet sunk into the ground. She could hear her arms grinding inside.

But nevertheless, Tamako would not run away.

As she stood with her bladed yo-yo in shield form, behind her was Anzu, passed out. If Tamako stopped defending against the attacks, Anzu would be pierced by the tail needle.

"... Ugh... Ta-Tamacchi... sempai...?"

When Anzu finally came to, she saw a terrific sight before her eyes. The scorpion relentlessly striking its tail, and Tamako protecting her from it.

"Y-you awake...!?"

"Tamacchi-sempai...?"

"Hurry, run away... Anzu...!"

"What are you saying!? Tamacchi-sempai, you need to run away!"

But as she blocked the scorpion Vertex's attacks with her bladed yo-yo shield, Tamako simply shook her head.

"Tama... can't..."

"Why not...!?"

"These attacks... have numbed my legs...! Maybe... shattered my bones even... I can't move...!"

"...!"

Anzu was at a loss for words.

Meanwhile, the scorpion tail continued to bore away at Tamako's bladed yo-yo.

"At the very least... you need to run away, Anzu...!!"

"I can't! How can I!?"

"At this rate...! We'll both die...!"

"No! No, can't be! There's still something, anything we can do...!"

Something similar had happened before. Tamako had gotten injured protecting Anzu from a Vertex attack.

No matter what happened, Tamako always protected Anzu even if it meant harm came to her instead.

Anzu couldn't just leave her alone and escape by herself.

"Anzu... you're so stubborn...!"

Tamako's bladed yo-yo began to crack under the stress of the repeated scorpion tail strikes.

"I don't care! I won't ever desert you!"

Anzu stood up and readied her crossbow.

(Anzu... Just run already...!)



Anzu stubbornly stood in place and fired arrows at the giant Vertex.

But the arrows merely stuck into the surface of the enemy's body, dealing no significant visible damage whatsoever.

(If you won't run away... then I've got no choice but to protect you...!)

The tail needle attacks further intensified. The force of each individual attack increased and the time between attacks shortened as well.

Clang!!

Clang!!

If she were an ordinary girl, Tamako's small body would've been torn to shreds with just a single attack.

(But I'll still protect her...!!)

The shock from each attack shook her brain, clouding her consciousness.

She felt as if each bone in her body broke, her muscles tore, her internal organs ruptured, her innards turned to mush.

(But I'll still protect her...!!)

She could no longer even tell if she was still standing.

She could no longer tell if her body was still in a humanoid shape.

(I'll protect her...!)

And yet Tamako continued to protect Anzu from the tail needle attacks.

The crack in her bladed yo-yo widened.

(I won't let you... touch a hair on Anzu's head...!)

Protect Anzu-- that was above all else, the Tamako's top priority.

(Tama's bladed yo-yo is... "Kamuyatatehime" [Divine house shield]...!)

The spiritual power imbued in her bladed yo-yo was called as such by miko.

Kamuyatatehime was the very concept of a "shield" formed by the aggregate god of the land god kings.

Due to Tamako's personality, she had been using her weapon offensively.

But its original nature-- was a shield.

Not a weapon for offense, but a guard for defense.

A sacred treasure that seemed to embody the desire "to protect Anzu".

(Tama is a shield! Anzu's shield...! So please, let me protect her...!)

Under the protection of Tamako's shield, Anzu kept firing arrows with her crossbow.

The golden arrows pierced into the Vertex.

(Even if each single shot is ineffective... as long as I keep attacking, then...!)

The name of the spiritual power imbued in Anzu's crossbow was "Kinkyusen" (golden bow and arrow).

According to legend, a single shot of the golden bow and arrow could shatter the bedrock of a cave. It was a weapon with that much destructive force.

It was truly a strange situation indeed.

The rambunctious, aggressive Tamako was given a defensive shield. The docile, introverted Anzu was given a destructive bow and arrow.

But perhaps in some sense each weapon matched its owner's inner feelings.

Tamako wanted to protect Anzu.

Anzu wanted to be strong like Tamako.

In that sense, giving Tamako a defensive weapon and Anzu an offensive weapon was appropriate for their individual desires.

(If Tamacchi-sempai's going to protect me... Then I'll defeat the enemy for her!)

Anzu fired shot at the scorpion-type Vertex with golden arrows which could shatter stone.

But their hopes and desires were meaningless before the overwhelming might.

The crack in Tamako's shield widened.

The arrows from Anzu's bow were ineffective.

And finally-- the shield shattered.

"Ah..."

The Vertex's tail needle pierced Tamako's abdomen.

The needle then skewered Anzu behind her as well.

"Agh, aagghhhhhhhhh!?"

A scream leaked out of Tamako's mouth.

Not from pain, but from the despair of failing to protect Anzu.

The thick needle was piercing through Tamako's abdomen. She turned around. There she saw Anzu, pierced in the chest. The light was already gone from her eyes.



(I need to remove the needle or IT HURTS IT HURTS IT HURTS Anzu will die she wasn't pierced in the heart so she might still survive everything will be fine IT HURTS I can't think the scorpion poison's in Tama's tummy get the needle out my innards are done for it's a fatal wound crap gotta save Anzu gotta get the needle out of her lung--)

What came out of Tamako's mouth the next moment wasn't a voice, but copious volumes of blood. And not just from her mouth, but from her eyes, ears, and nose. Blood spilled. Perhaps due to the poison, she experienced bizarre symptoms that could not be explained by the stab wound alone.

Anzu's limp body too began to ooze blood from every orifice.

Tamako's sight darkened.

At the very end, she felt as if she heard someone shouting. But she could no longer tell who it was.

"Rroooooghhhhh!!""

Wakaba howled as she made her way towards the scorpion-type Vertex. She had finally swept away the evolved Vertexes that had been blocking her way.

Her body swelled with the mortification of being unable to save Tamako and Anzu and her rage against the Vertex.

The scorpion shook its tail as if to wipe away unwanted filth, flinging off Tamako and Anzu's skewered bodies. And now it swung its tail needle at Wakaba.

"Rrrooooohhhhhh!!"

Wakaba, her physical ability augmented by the fairy Yoshitsune, dodged the tail needle attack and swung her sword enraged.

She slashed at the scorpion-type Vertex dozens, hundreds of times... faster than the human eye could see. But she merely scratched the surface of its body, seemingly to no effect.

"Ahhhhhh!!"

Screaming out of despair, Chikage began slicing away at the scorpion-type Vertex as well. With the power of the Shichinin Misaki, seven Chikages swung their scythes at once-- but to no effect.

As they slashed away, one by one, a Chikage would get stabbed and vanish, only for a new one to take her place. As long as she was protected by the Shichinin Misaki's ability, she would not die unless all seven Chikages received a fatal wound simultaneously. Without that divine protection, she likely would've died in an instant.

The Chikages kept swinging their scythes, paying no heed to how they were getting stabbed one after the other.

Before the overwhelming might of the enemy, fear had her at the edge of sanity.

It was an evolved Vertex that not even trump cards could handle.

No, "evolved" didn't even begin to describe it.

It was a "perfect Vertex".

The enemy's true form.

The white monsters the heroes had been fighting up until now were not even Vertexes.

"An-chan!! Tama-chaaaaan!!"
Yuuna rushed up to Tamako and Anzu, whose bodies had fallen to the forestized ground.

"...!!"

The sight of their bodies robbed Yuuna of any words.

Their bodies were covered in blood. Tamako's abdomen and Anzu's chest each had gaping holes. Their wounds were clearly fatal at first glance. No medical treatment, nor miracle had any hope at all of saving their lives--

And yet they were still alive. They grasped each other's hands as if to make sure they were still there.

They were losing their sight, hearing, and capability to think. Everything. Faced with their impending deaths, Tamako and Anzu grasped each others' hands.

The sensation of the other's hand was one thing they had left.

As her consciousness faded, Tamako thought to herself-- The next time I'm reborn, I want to be with Anzu. It would be nice to be real sisters...

Even without exchanging words, Anzu wished for the same thing-- If I were to be reborn, I pray I'll be with Tamako. I'm sure we can be sisters next time...

And then-- their hands lost their strength.

Their arrangements to hold a flower viewing party would go unfulfilled.

"Waahhhhhhh!!"

Yuuna's cry echoed through the forestized world.

She disconnected from Ichimokuren's power and immediately used a second fairy's power.

A fairy particularly feared by the Taisha, and thus a fairy the heroes were strictly ordered never to use-- Yuuna would now unleash that fairy's power.

"Come--"

King of oni.

Born of the land snake who dared bare its fangs at the heavenly gods.

One of the nations three great evil yokai.

Incarnation of unparalleled power.

"--Shuten-doji!!"

(Chapter 13 End)



DENGEKI G's

NOVEL

VOLUME FOURTEEN!!
14



ウルトラ怪獣擬人化計画

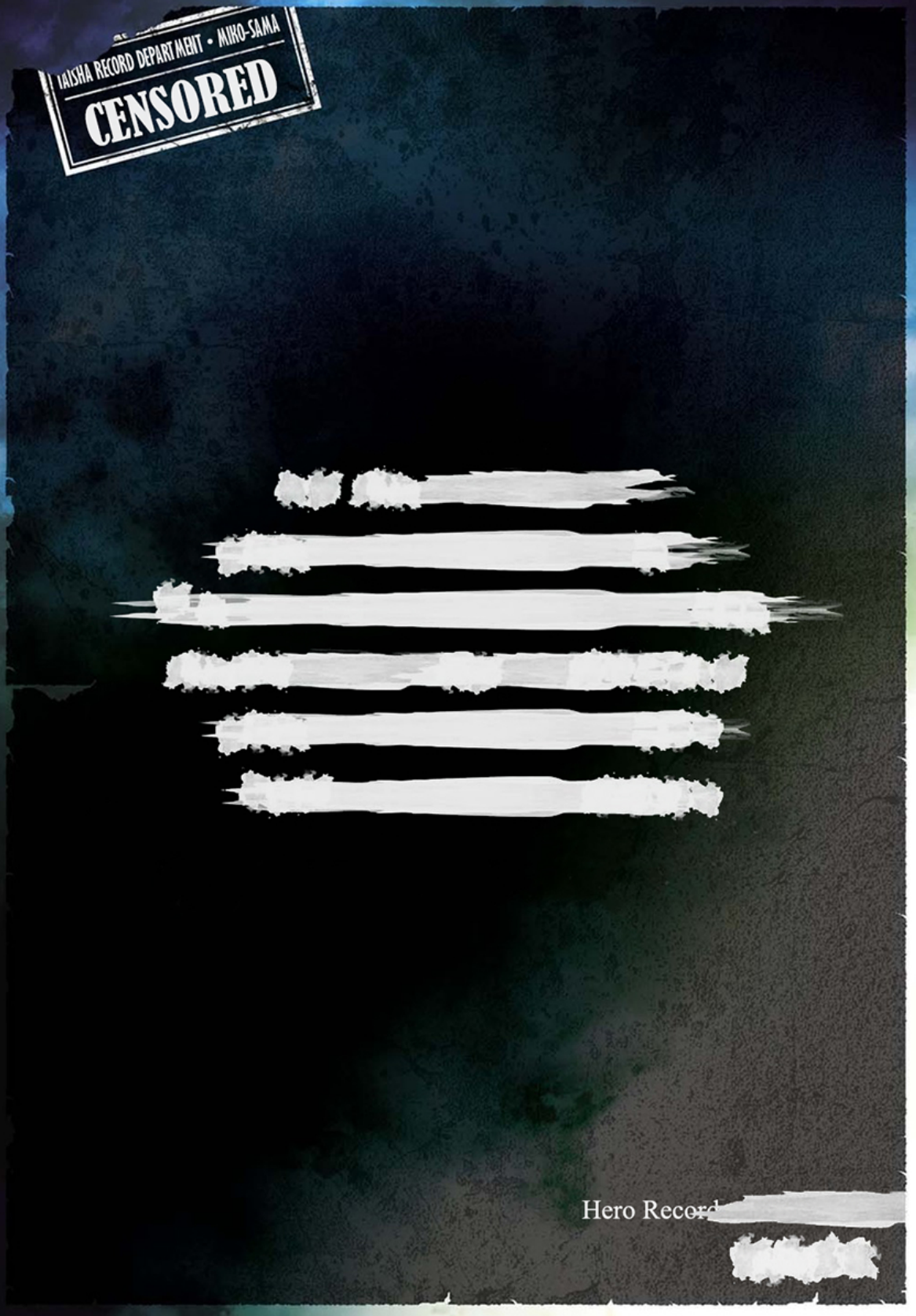
設定・原案・シリーズ構成：海法紀光
執筆：谷崎央佳（ミームミーム）　イラスト：ハル犬
原作・監修：円谷プロダクション

ガーリッシュナンバー

著：渡 航
キャラクター原案・カラーイラスト：QP:flapper
モノクロイラスト：やむ茶

乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H


TAISHA RECORD DEPARTMENT • MIKO-SAMA
CENSORED
Hero Record



第十四話
―茨道

vol.14

Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JWWORKS
Supervision by Project 2H

企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JWWORKS
監修／Project 2H

乃木若葉は勇者である

©2014 Project 2H



Wakaba was at a loss for how to deal with the scorpion-type Vertex. Even with the power of the fairy Yoshitsune, she could not damage the scorpion-type Vertex in the slightest.

Chikage had been attacking the Vertex several times at once through the power of Shichinin Misaki, but again, to no avail.

Unable to even clear her mind of her regrets over Tamako and Anzu, Wakaba despaired at her powerlessness.

"!?"

Suddenly, Wakaba sensed an anomaly in the Jukai.

Part of the Jukai's vegetation began to change color, as if rotting away. The decay was spreading forth from the scorpion-type Vertex's path and the places its attacks had damaged the vegetation.

(... Is it corroding into the Jukai...!?)

Once Forestization subsides, any Vertex damage done to the Jukai causes feedback to the real world in the form of disasters and accidents in Shikoku-- That was what the Taisha had told the girls. In all of the battles so far, the Jukai had not been damaged significantly to the point where Shikoku had suffered any harm. But now, this corrosion on the other hand...

Just then, a roar resounded throughout the Forestized Marugame City.

"Waaaaaaaahhhh!!"

When Wakaba turned around to look, there stood Yuuna, shouting over the dead bodies of Tamako and Anzu.

"Come-- Shuten-Doji!!"

Yuuna had called off the power of Ichimokuren to imbue her body with the power of a new fairy.

A power far beyond the human body and therefore forbidden.

The power of a demon king.

Yuuna's hero garments transformed. Her weapons strengthened. Those tekko gloves grew an absurd enormity unfitting of such a small girl. They seemed warped, even.

"Rrrooooohhh!!"

Yuuna kicked off the ground, leaping toward the scorpion-type Vertex.

As shown by the enormity of those tekko gloves, Shuten-Doji's power was specialized for destructive force.

Yuuna punched the scorpion-type Vertex in the face.

"Rrroohhhhh!!"

Or rather, the giant Vertex's front side, which was reminiscent of an expressionless human face. She shattered it in one blow.

The sight of Yuuna with the power of a new fairy was a shock to Wakaba.

In a matter of mere moments, Yuuna had destroyed a part of the nigh-invulnerable scorpion-type Vertex.

(What power...)

It truly was unimaginable power.

That-- truly was a trump card among trump cards, and the Taisha was right to classify it as dangerous.

A power born out of the reckless desire for power, with a complete disregard for its burden to the body.

After she had smashed its front face, Yuuna's second strike tore into the scorpion-type Vertex's liquid-filled abdomen. Her third strike shattered the tail. The giant Vertex's crumbling body became hollow inside.

(But Yuuna... just how severe will the kickback be for using such unbridled power...!?)

The heroes' physical abilities were indeed strengthened, but even with that amplification in consideration, Yuuna was clearly going overboard with the power she was using.

"Uwwaaaaahhhh!!"

Yuuna kept screaming as she destroyed the scorpion-type Vertex.

She cried and screamed her lungs out.

Yuuna's attacks robbed the giant Vertex's body of its form, causing its constituent common Vertexes to defuse and disperse.

But each of those common Vertexes was equally guilty of Tamako and Anzu's deaths. Yuuna's fists would not stop until every last common Vertex was annihilated.

"Yuuna! That's enough! No more! Think about your body! Leave the rest to me!!"

But Wakaba's cries fell on deaf ears as Yuuna's fists kept pounding...

And finally--

The giant Vertex was destroyed by Yuuna's overwhelming power, and the remaining common Vertexes were swept up by the three heroes.

With the battle over, Forestization cleared away, returning Shikoku to its original scenery.



The citizens were unaware that the battle had occurred. The same daily events from before the Vertex invasion continued uninterrupted.

But two heroes had been lost.

After the battle had finished, Wakaba and the others went to a Taisha-connected hospital for a thorough examination. Wakaba and Chikage were discharged at night, but Yuuna had to stay hospitalized.

After sweeping way the Vertexes, Yuuna had lost consciousness and even now had yet to recover. It was perhaps the kickback from imbuing herself with Shuten-Doji, but neither Wakaba nor Chikage could get the Taisha to tell them anything about Yuuna's condition. All they were told was that she was not in mortal danger.

After returning from the hospital, Wakaba and Chikage went to their own rooms without exchanging a word. Chikage hid her face and fell silent, rejecting any attempts at conversation through her demeanor and Wakaba wanted to be alone for now herself.

Wakaba blankly watched as the news played on TV in her room.

(I knew casualties were always a possibility. And I thought I was ready to face that, but...)

Regret, indignation, and helplessness filled Wakaba's mind. But perhaps of the overwhelming shock, no tears seemed to flow. All she could think about was why she couldn't save Tamako and Anzu. There had to have been a way.

The TV was still on. A newscaster was reporting on a tornado that had formed in Marugame City, tearing down buildings and causing deaths and injuries.

The tornado was an effect of the Vertex damage and corrosion to the Jukai. The giant Vertex from the last battle had the power to infiltrate the divine protection and corrode the Jukai. That was the Taisha's guess.

(... There were civilian casualties too...)

Two heroes had lost their lives.

They could not protect the people of Shikoku.

Though the Vertexes had been annihilated, the battle was far from a victory.

Wakaba bit her lip.

So hard that it bled.

Chikage locked herself up alone in her room.

She took the fetal position on her bed and trembled.

The two heroes, Tamako and Anzu, had been killed.

"Ugh, uuuuuugh.... What the hell...! What the hell was that monster...!?"

It was in a class far outstripping those of the Vertexes they had previously fought. Had Yuuna not used the power of Shuten-Doji, the heroes would have faced certain annihilation.

Previously, some among the Taisha had theorized that Vertex fusion and evolution was not the product of chaos, but that of deliberate design to reach some desired form.

The unique Vertex that appeared in this attack... was truly the apex of Vertex evolution. And thus the Taisha had concluded that this was perhaps the Vertex's perfect form.

However-- there was an even worse possibility.

The giant Vertex that Yuuna defeated was hollow inside. In other words, perhaps the so-called perfect Vertex was still incomplete.

Perhaps the true perfect form was even stronger than what Yuuna had defeated this time.

(If such a thing were to show up... then we're all...)

Dead. Like Tamako and Anzu.

"No... Please, no...!"

I'm scared.

I don't want to die.

The fear Chikage felt from her first battle against the Vertexes rose back up from the depths of her brain.

The sight of Tamako and Anzu's tragic deaths flashed before her eyes.

Her sight grew dark.

She rushed to the bathroom out of nausea.

But since she hadn't eaten anything, there was nothing in her stomach to empty.

As she kept vomiting over the toilet, tears streamed from her eyes.

"Ugh, uuuughhh... why did this have to...! Uggghh....!"



Hinata was told about what had happened during the Vertex battle. The largest, strongest Vertex ever seen. The corrosion of the Jukai. Yuuna's use of Shuten-Doji's power. And finally-- the deaths of Doi Tamako and Iwojima Anzu.

The remains of the two heroes were being safeguarded in Marugame Castle until the funeral service.
Hinata reverently wiped the bodies of Tamako and Anzu with a damp cloth. Such was part of the purification ceremony for the deceased.

Wiping the bloodstained bodies of her friends was a harsh task for a girl her age. But Hinata volunteered to take on this role herself.

(This... is all I can do for them.)

Now that heroes had fallen, Hinata was painfully aware of the difference in standpoint between a hero and a miko. When she were by the heroes' side, she could not save them. She could only wait in a safe place. Her heart wrenched in guilt.

(So at least-- at least let me cleanse their bodies with my own hands...)

Wakaba and Chikage had locked themselves in their rooms ever since the hospital examination. There was nothing she could do about that.

Just standing in the presence of her two friends' remains was enough to make Hinata's feet unsteady with sorrow. She could not even begin to imagine the shock Wakaba and Chikage felt to see them get killed in person. The heroes were the guardians of Shikoku and held power far transcending that of ordinary humans, but Chikage and Wakaba were still just girls in middle school regardless.

After a long time had passed and Hinata had finished cleansing the two heroes' remains, she headed towards their rooms. To sort through the belongings of the deceased. She thought that perhaps she could find some sort of memento to give to Aki Masuzu, a miko that the two were friends with.

In Tamako's room, Hinata found several outdoor goods that she could not even begin to imagine how to use. As she went through each one, Hinata cried. It felt as if there were a piece of Tamako imbued within each of the things in this room, making it difficult for Hinata to sort through.

In the end, she couldn't choose anything to give to Aki, so she left Tamako's room and headed to Anzu's.

Anzu's room was the same. The sight of the bookshelves packed with books brought Hinata to tears once again. Each of those books was proof that Anzu had been alive just a short while ago.

The next day, Anzu and Tamako's funeral ceremony was quietly held with just miko and Taisha officials attending.

The Taisha had still not decided whether or not to reveal to the Shikoku public that the two heroes had been killed in action. After all, the Taisha had already resorted to distorting the information of the Honshu expedition in order to give the people hope. If they were to now announce the loss of two heroes and the appearance of a hero-resistant enemy, the public could once again lose hope. There were far too many people who relied on the heroes as a source of emotional support.

And thus, the Taisha wished to keep the two deaths and the giant Vertex a secret. But the previous heavy media coverage of the heroes was now backfiring on them. They couldn't possibly keep Tamako and Anzu's deaths secret forever. And thus, the Taisha was having a hard time figuring out how to time the announcements.

The caskets housing the two heroes' remains were covered with white cloth and the funeral visitors went up to pay their respects.

Wakaba and Chikage were in a daze, their faces as blank as if all they saw was a film lacking any realism. Hinata hid her grief-stricken face the entire time.

But missing among all the funeral visitors was one conspicuous absentee: Yuuna. She was still unable to go leave the special therapy room.

One miko broke down crying as she was paying her respects.

Aki Masuzu.

"Idiots... Why... did you have to die..."

Aki always had Tamako and Anzu on her mind, but the Taisha had afforded her next to no opportunities to meet with them due to her duties as a miko. And now that she had finally gotten to see them again, neither Tamako nor Anzu could talk to her, or move, ever again.

"If I knew this would happen... I should've spent more time with them, even if I had to force my way there... I should've never left them..."

Hinata kept her head down, unable to find any words to comfort Aki.

"... I should've stayed... by the heroes' side..."

The funeral service continued monotonously without any regard to Aki's tear-soaked face.



Afterwards, a Senreisai and Sojosai were performed, but Wakaba was still unable to feel any sense of reality and just let the time tick in a daze until eventually, the funeral service came to a close.

Days passed.

School resumed, but only Wakaba and Hinata came to class. Yuuna was still in the hospital and Chikage kept calling in sick.

"It's kind of lonely here..."

Hinata murmured.

"Yeah, I guess..."

Wakaba's voice lacked its usual sense of ambition.

Out of six desks, only two were occupied.

"... But it looks like Yuuna-san will be discharged soon. And once that happens, I'm sure Chikage-san will start coming to school again."

Hinata strained to speak cheerfully.

Wakaba gazed outside the window.

The countless sakura trees around the Marugame Castle grounds were blooming with so many flowers they looked like they were on fire. The sakura in full bloom [TL: mankai] would probably fall by the end of the week.

--Okay, then once our next Vertex battle's over, let's go flower viewing to celebrate!!

--Hopefully we can go flower viewing soon...

Tamako and Anzu's words played back in the back of Wakaba's head.

"We couldn't go flower viewing..."

The wind swept up sakura petals and scattered them incessantly onto the ground.

After the funeral service, Chikage kept inside her room at all essentially all times, only going outside when it was absolutely necessary. She only ate instant foods and snacks she had stockpiled.

Worried about her behavior, the Taisha sent her an email saying "You may have acquired PTSD from your last battle, so please come in for some counseling." Chikage ignored it.

(What the hell... could a counselor even understand...?)

Fighting is frightening.

But a hero that doesn't fight is worthless.

Chikage doesn't want to be worthless like she was in the past, so she has to fight.

But--

In the back of her mind is the sight of Tamako and Anzu's cruel deaths.

(... I hate being worthless... but I'm afraid of fighting...)

Chikage lay face down on the bed and thought repetitive thoughts to no avail.

She didn't want to see anyone now. She didn't feel like talking.

"... But... if it were Takashima-san..."

She thought she didn't want to talk with anyone, but she did in fact want to talk with Yuuna.

Yuuna's existence was Chikage's final pillar of psychological support.

By now, Yuuna had been transferred from the special therapy room to the regular hospital ward, so visitors were no longer prohibited.

Chikage got up from bed, changed out of her pajamas, and left her room. The sun was already setting, but since she had gone several days without sunlight, her eyes still hurt a little.

Chikage went to the hospital, asked for Yuuna's room at reception, and headed that way. Along the way, she caught sight of some people talking. These people appeared to be family of victims from the tornado that happened as a result of the Vertex attack.

... How unfortunate... well, he did manage to survive the 7/30 disaster a few years back... I guess there's nothing you can do about natural disasters...



They were speaking about such things in a sorrowful tone.

Those people were unaware that the tornado was an effect of the Vertex attack. It was no natural disaster-- and if giant Vertexes like that one keep attacking, then the same thing will probably keep happening.

When Chikage reached Yuuna's room and opened the door, she found her gazing outside the window absentmindedly. When she noticed Chikage enter, Yuuna put on a bright smile.

"Gun-chan! You came!"

"Yeah... Takashima-san... is your body okay...?"

"Well, besides my arms, it's a perfect recovery already!"

As she spoke, Yuuna showed off her still-bandaged arms. Yuuna's fighting style means that although she wears tekko gloves, she still strikes the enemy with her fists, which probably causes quite the recoil in her arms. Her hand injuries looked painful, but she had no other obvious injuries.

"What about you, Gun-chan, you okay?"

"Mm..."

"Well, you look kind of pale, so..."

Yuuna looked at Chikage with a worried look on her face.

"A lot happened..."

Chikage averted her eyes from Yuuna as she answered.

The emergence of an overly powerful enemy. Anzu and Tamako's funeral service. Chikage's nights spent in fear...

Chikage's spirit was full of cracks and was on the verge of collapse.

"I... I just don't know what to do anymore..."

Chikage's voice wavered as she did her best to hold back the tears.

"Gun-chan, come here."

The quivering Chikage drew near as told and Yuuna gently embraced her.

"It's okay, Gun-chan. There's no need to be afraid. ... No matter what happens, I'll protect you. I won't let anyone else get hurt again."

"..."

Chikage felt a strong will behind Yuuna's words. Within the embrace of Yuuna's arms, Chikage could feel her fear slowly fade away.

The previous battle should've been a big shock for Yuuna too. She saw Anzu and Tamako die before her eyes, and she herself got heavily injured and was hospitalized--

And yet she was worried more about Chikage than herself.

Chikage was brought to the verge of tears.

(... I'm a hero too... And I'm older, so...)

--I have to get my act together.

Chikage held back her tears and looked up.

"I'm... okay now..."

Chikage spoke in a small, but resolute voice.

Starting the next day, three students were coming to the Marugame Castle classroom.

There hadn't been any Vertex attacks in a while, so on the surface, the days were peaceful.

Before long, the sakura petals had all fallen.

Eventually May came along and Yuuna was discharged and returned to school.

And when the time came for Yuuna's hand bandages to be removed, the Taisha passed along a task to the heroes:

Take down an evolved Vertex forming over the Seto Inland Sea.

Now, Wakaba, Yuuna, and Chikage transformed into their hero forms and stood atop of the Seto Ohashi Bridge.

"This is kind of an unusual task, huh? Usually we only defeat the enemies that enter Shikoku." Yuuna said dubiously.

"True. Maybe the Taisha's plan changed..."

Wakaba didn't understand the real intention either.



They were told that the evolved Vertex was forming outside the wall close to the Seto Ohashi Bridge.

But as far as they could see from atop the bridge, there was no enemy in sight. If it were as big as the scorpion-type Vertex that appeared last time, they would've been able to see it from across the wall already. Which meant that perhaps this Vertex wasn't as giant as the last one.

In that case, why would the Taisha abruptly change the plan and order a takedown of a Vertex that wasn't even coming into the barrier--

Wakaba turned her head.

Overcome with a strange feeling, Wakaba and the others advanced down the Seto Ohashi Bridge and across the wall to the outside.

"--!?"

That very moment, a bizarre sight entered Wakaba's vision.

Right outside the wall-- over the ocean, right by the Seto Ohashi Bridge, was a giant Vertex even bigger than the scorpion-type. Perhaps it wasn't complete just yet. Common Vertexes were gathering and fusing to it one after the other.

Wakaba's surprise was twofold. First at how such a large Vertex was being formed. Second at how they couldn't even see that Vertex until they had gotten that close to it.

A Vertex that huge should've been visible from inside the wall.

Wakaba suddenly got the idea to backtrack the Seto Ohashi Bridge back inside the wall.

Once inside, she looked towards the outside and, as she thought, the conspicuously huge Vertex was conspicuously invisible.

Yuuna and Chikage followed suit and noticed the anomaly.

Wakaba furrowed her eyebrows.

"Is it hiding...?"

Perhaps this was another effect of the barrier. Those inside the barrier couldn't see any anything strange happening outside, allowing people to see things inside the barrier as if everything were still normal and peaceful.

If the citizens of Shikoku could see the giant Vertex outside the barrier, they probably would be unable to continue life as usual. After all, the Vertexes are the cause of the psychological uranophobia syndrome. So with that considered, perhaps this was one way the Shinju was protecting the people but regardless--

The list of things hidden to the public just kept growing.





"... Let's forget about the barrier for now... and focus on killing that Vertex..."

Once Chikage said that, Wakaba finally remembered their original task.

There was nothing the three could do about the barrier either way. So what they needed to focus on now was to deal with that giant Vertex.

The three heroes went outside the wall once again and looked at the forming giant Vertex. Even though it was still incomplete, it was bigger than the scorpion-type Vertex that caused them so much despair. If the Vertex were to complete its perfect form and invade Shikoku--

Could the heroes stop it?

No, could they even defeat it at this stage?

The heroes' attacks were essentially ineffective against the scorpion-type Vertex.

(But... we have no choice but to try!)

Wakaba used a trump card without hesitation. She imbued her body with the fairy Yoshitsune and her hero garment transformed.

Chikage likewise imbued herself with Shichinin Misaki and appeared at seven places at once.

Yuuna was about to use a trump card as well, but Wakaba stopped her.

"Wait! It's too dangerous for you to use a trump card, Yuuna. Leave it to us."

Yuuna's external wounds had already healed, and she appeared uninjured at a glance. However, there was the possibility of internal effects that not even the doctors could explain. And for that reason, the Taisha strictly forbade Yuuna from using trump cards. Not just Shuten-Doji, but Ichimokuren as well. They had no idea what might happen if she did use one.

"But..."

Wakaba's words left Yuuna at a loss, but Chikage sided with Wakaba.

"Nogi-san's right... Takashima-san, wait here..."

Chikage recalled the painful sight of Yuuna's arms when she was in the hospital. Maybe Yuuna had forced her way to leave the hospital and participate in the battle-- Chikage considered that possibility. It seemed plausible considering Yuuna's disposition.

"... Okay, gotcha."

Her teammates' adamant pleas convinced Yuuna to step down.

Wakaba and the Seven Chikages then leaped from the Seto Ohashi Bridge towards the giant Vertex.

"Haaaaaaahhhh!!"

Her physical ability amplified with the fairy's power, Wakaba swung her drawn sword at the Vertex several times her size.

The sight of the deceased Tamako and Anzu rose up from the back of her head.

She had to protect Shikoku from this Vertex or their deaths would have been for nothing.

But the sharp brandishing of her sword was unable to even scratch the giant enemy's body.

(Not that I wasn't expecting that...!)

This kind of Vertex truly did have an absurd amount of stamina.

Wakaba jumped off of nearby common Vertexes one by one using Hasso Tobi, increasing the speed of her jumps. If she went in for the strike at a higher speed, her attack would have increased force. Once Wakaba reached a speed imperceptible to the human eye, she used her momentum to rain hundreds of slashes everywhere upon the giant Vertex's body.

However--

(Still not effective...!!)

The most she could do was scratch it.

The Seven Chikages tried attacking with seven scythes simultaneously as well, but just like with the scorpion-type Vertex, there seemed to be no effect.

The other common Vertexes seemed to realize that the giant Vertex's stamina was too much for the heroes as well-- most of the small fry ignored the heroes and only a few attacked them. Instead, the common Vertexes would fuse with the giant Vertex, prioritizing the completion of the perfect form.

Wakaba kicked away the occasional attacking common Vertex as she continued to rain down slashes upon the giant one. She knew it was ineffective, but there was no other way.

Several minutes after the heroes had begun attacking, the giant Vertex finally began moving and changed its position.

"--!?"

Instinctively detecting danger, Wakaba distanced herself from the giant Vertex. Not a moment later, a tremendous fireball shot out of the Vertex aimed right at where Wakaba used to be.

The Seven Chikages were midair in the process of launching an attack at the giant Vertex and were unable to dodge in time. Six of the seven were engulfed in the fireball and vanished.

The fireball crossed the Seto Inland Sea and made landfall onto Honshu. The intense roar and shock wave reached back to the heroes.



Wakaba and Chikage landed on the Seto Ohashi Bridge, dumbfounded.

That attack happened to be aimed at the mainland, but if that same attack were to reach the Shinju--

(We'd have no way to defend it...)

The heroes were in shock at that realization.

And that wasn't even the enemy's final form. If the fusion continued to completion... there would be nothing in the future but dispair.

"... Wakaba-chan. Gun-chan. I really should use Shuten-Doji."

Yuuna spoke with a resolute voice.

"Yuuna!"

"Takashima-san...!"

Without paying heed to Wakaba or Chikage, Yuuna closed her eyes and concentrated on her inner body. "I swear I'll protect everyone in Shikoku... I won't let our world come to an end... I won't let Tama-chan and An-chan's sacrifices end in vain...!"

Wakaba gasped. By merely standing there, she could sense the intimidating presence of a demon king.

"Ugh, uuaaaagghh...!"

But Yuuna's face twisted in agony. The smooth transformation that normally came with using a trump card was nowhere to be seen.

"Wait, Yuuna! Your body really can't take it..."

"No... it can!!!"

Her fairy-aided transformation still incomplete, Yuuna leaped from the Seto Ohashi Bridge towards the giant Vertex.

She clenched her fist as she made her approach.

As if they too had felt the threat of Yuuna's presence, the common Vertexes began to attack Yuuna to defend the giant Vertex. But Yuuna's cannonball-like fist instantly shattered them into oblivion.

Yuuna was still not completely imbued with the fairy. And yet she already commanded such strength.

Shuten-Doji truly was head and shoulders above the other fairies in terms of power.

However-- that also meant that the kickback would be tremendous as well.

"HERO... PUUUUUUUNCH!!"

Yuuna's fist smashed into the giant Vertex-- or at least it should have.

But before the attack could connect, huge volumes of blood spewed from Yuuna's mouth.

"Agh, ggh...!"

Not even Yuuna's body was perfect, after all.

Yuuna collapsed midair and fell into the sea.

"Yuunaaaaaaa!!"

"Takashima-saaaaaaan!!"

Wakaba and Chikage's cries of Yuuna's name echoed across the Seto Inland Sea.

After rescuing Yuuna from the sea, Wakaba and Chikage retreated back into the barrier. Yuuna's condition appeared to be caused by the flesh reaching the limits of tolerance to fairy power. She was quickly readmitted to the hospital.

Wakaba and Chikage were unable to do any damage to the giant Vertex, and Yuuna, the only one with any means of effective attack was out of commission.

At their current state, there was no way for them to defeat the giant Vertex outside the barrier. Since it was prioritizing the formation of its body and showed no signs of invading Shikoku, the Taisha decided to set up some sort of countermeasure before the enemy completed its perfect form.

(If Anzu were alive... she might've been able to come up with some sort of strategy...)

Frustration and grief surged from within Wakaba.

She saw no possible way they could break out of this deadlock.

That night, Chikage piled up old magazine and newspaper articles about the heroes on her desk. Her pillar of support, Yuuna, was hospitalized again, and she couldn't visit her. The only moral support Chikage had to rely on now was the fact that "I am a hero". That is, the voices of those who recognized her worth as a hero.

The newspaper and magazine articles published so far had tons of praise for the heroes. Many of the articles focused on Wakaba, but Chikage naturally was praised as a hero herself.

Those words of praise just barely managed to support Chikage's collapsing mental state. They were sort of like a drug to her.

Chikage booted up her laptop to search for more articles praising the heroes on the net. The heroes were like idols to the people of Shikoku. There should be plenty of voices praising them online.



She browsed through Social Networking Sites and anonymous bulletin boards and--

"... huh...?"

There were voices praising the heroes, but there were also voices of a completely different sort.

The Taisha hadn't made an official announcement of the heroes' defeat, but some people were already gossiping about it.

'Apparently a new type of monster has appeared and they can't do shit about it. I heard some heroes have been killed already.'

'Doi Tamako and Iwojima Anzu are the ones that died.'

'Don't fall for the fed and Taisha's lies!'

'The heroes lost? For real? What a bunch of useless brats.'

'Remember that big-ass tornado? That newtype monster caused it.'

'Not entirely sure how this shit works, but since the heroes failed to defeat the monster, it caused the tornado.'

'Why the hell won't they tell us normal people anything!?'

'You haven't protected us for shit, heroes.'

'Guess it's our fault for getting our hopes up.'

'Told you guys the heroes were useless.'

'They were hyped up for nothing.'

'Useless.'

As she read the words peeking out from the depths of the internet, Chikage's hands shook.

"Why... just... why..."

She put her life on the line to protect the people of Shikoku.

And yet--

"..."

Within Chikage's eyes ignited the dark light of hatred.

(Chapter 14 END)

DENGEKI G's

NOVEL

VOLUME FIFTEEN!!
15



乃木若葉は勇者である

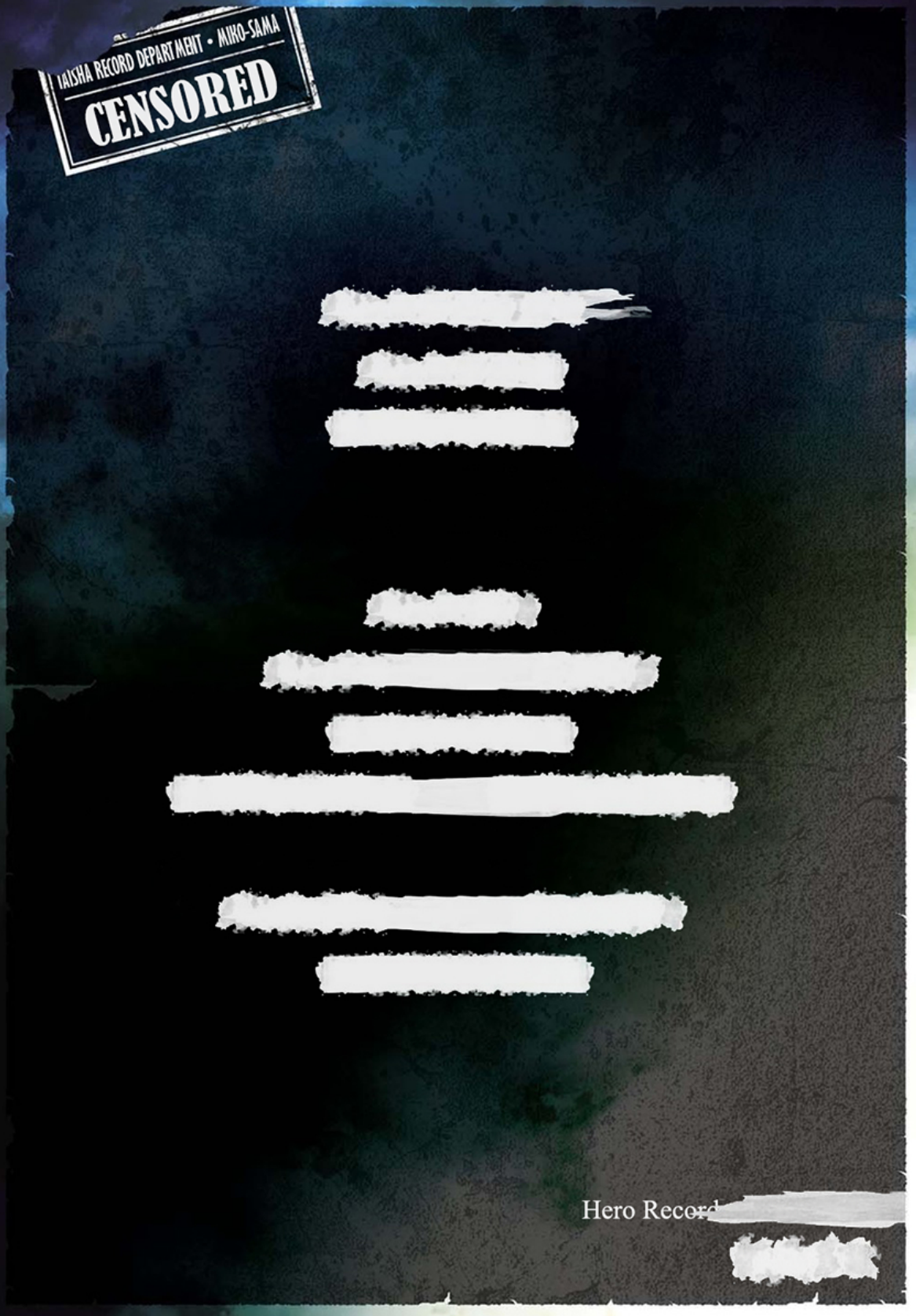
企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

ウルトラ怪獣擬人化計画

設定・原案・シリーズ構成：海法紀光
執筆：谷崎央佳（ミームミーム）　イラスト：ハル犬
原作・監修：円谷プロダクション

ガーリッシュナンバー

著：渡 航
キャラクター原案・カラーイラスト：QP:flapper
モノクロイラスト：堂本裕貴


TAISHA RECORD DEPARTMENT • MIKO-SAMA
CENSORED
Hero Record


vol.15
Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JWWORKS
Supervision by Project 2H
第十五話
―病葉―
乃木若葉は勇者である
企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JWWORKS
監修／Project 2H
©2014 Project 2H



Vertex invasions became a common occurrence.

Although the large "perfect" Vertexes weren't included in the raids, the common and evolved level Vertexes were incessantly invading Shikoku.

Anzu and Tamako were no more.

Yuuna was hospitalized and could not participate in battle.

Meaning Wakaba and Chikage were the only heroes who could fight.

Though the invading swarms were not particularly overwhelming in size, the heroes would have a tough battle due to having only two members on their side.

"Eat shit...!"

The seven Chikages formed by Shichinin Misaki's power swung seven scythes at an evolved Vertex at the same time, shredding it into tiny pieces which vanished.

"Haah... haah..."

The physically exhausted Chikage was released of her trump card's power, and she returned to being a singular entity. She took a knee on the ground, her legs too fatigued to stand.

She looked up to see the Yoshitsune-imbued Wakaba cutting down the final remnants of the Vertexes.

"Phew..."

Wakaba sighed and landed right beside Chikage. She released her trump card and returned to her normal hero outfit.

"It's finally over, huh. How many does that make this month?"

"... I got tired of counting already..."

"There've been way too many invasions lately..."

Conspicuous injuries riddled the two girls' bodies. They had been grazed by evolved Vertex arrows and bruised by their blows.

Wakaba surveyed the entire Jukai.

"The corrosion happened again, huh..."

Part of the Jukai had become discolored and decayed-looking. Lately, the invading Vertexes have had the power to corrode the Jukai despite not being perfect Vertexes. The heroes had to hasten their battle in order to minimize the damage to the Jukai, but with ony two of them, the battles would drag on nonetheless. The longer the battles went on, the more the Jukai corroded. And corrosion to the Jukai meant putting the citizens of Shikoku in harm's way.

"The Jukai corrosion isn't the only problem..."

Chikage looked towards the Seto Inland Sea barrier.

Beyond that barrier, a Vertex was forming. A Vertex stronger than the scorpion-type one that killed Anzu and Tamako. Neither the Taisha nor the Heroes had been able to come up with a way to defeat that giant Vertex.

Thanks to Tamako and Anzu's deaths and the appearance of an unbeatable enemy, Chikage had thought a lot about death lately. She could very well join them one day. It wasn't any stretch of the imagination.

(Just what... am I fighting for...?)

In the back of her head, she replayed the anti-hero criticism that had been spreading through the population.

You're useless. Worthless. Unnecessary. Disappear. Nobody cares if you're gone. Stop kidding yourself. You're incompetent. Weak as hell. Did you even try? How did you lose? You're useless. Worthless.

(I'm putting my life in mortal danger... whittling away my body with fairy power... and for what...?)

After forestization lifted, Wakaba and Chikage were examined at the hospital as usual.

Hinata escorted them there and stayed in the waiting room until they were done. With the rising rate of Vertex invasions, spending time in the waiting room had become a near daily activity for her, but each visit as bitter as the last. What truly frustrated Hinata was her powerlessness and inability to help the heroes.

Hinata tried to distract herself with a newspaper that was left in the waiting room. In it were articles about the disasters caused by Jukai corrosion and the Taisha's search for a counter plan.

The repeated corrosion of the Jukai.

The resulting accidents and disasters.

The deaths of Tamako and Anzu had leaked to the general public.



The Taisha concluded that suppressing the information was impossible and officially announced the hero deaths and the link between the frequent calamities and Vertex attacks. Thanks to the Taisha's information control, the newspapers and TV news reported with a positive slant the heroes' victories and the Taisha's activities.

However-- voices of anxiety cried up throughout the population. Crime and suicides rose. Public order was collapsing.

"Sorry for the wait, Hinata."

Done with her examinations, Wakaba walked into the waiting room.

"Not at all. I'm the one who chose to wait here on my own."

Hinata quickly returned the newspaper she was reading to the magazine rack, but not before Wakaba noticed the article she was reading.

"Hmm... more victims, huh..."

An unpleasant expression arose on Wakaba's face.

"It's not your fault, Wakaba-chan... In fact, it's thanks to you two that more people didn't get hurt."

Hinata tried using gentle words of encouragement, but Wakaba didn't cheer up.

"The doctor said... I'm using trump cards too much. It's apparently taking a toll on my body. But I have to use trump cards if I want to keep the corrosion down to a minimum..."

Wakaba sat down on the waiting room sofa and sighed.

"It's a war of attrition, I guess... We're at an impasse here."

"... True..."

The damage to the citizens must be minimized.

But if the heroes continued to use trump cards, they would be the first to fall.

A short moment later, Chikage returned to the waiting room.

"Is your body okay?"

Hinata looked at Chikage's face with concern.

"It's far from okay... Besides, they said to hold back on using trump cards..."

"You too, huh?"

Wakaba furrowed her eyebrows.

"Those guys... just don't understand... Just what do they think we've been wearing away at our bodies for? Don't they get we're just trying to minimize damage...?"

Chikage cast her eyes down as she rambled in frustration.

"In that case, fine, I'll just stop using trump cards... And then we'll see how many victims turn up. That'll teach them... Shikoku the Taisha alike... They talk big for cowards in thier safe places...! What the hell do they even--"

"Chikage, that's enough."

Wakaba interrupted. For she had noticed the sad look on Hinata's face. Hinata knew her role put her in a safe place in society and felt guilty about it. The phrase "cowards in their safe places" just rubbed salt into the wound.

However, Hinata gently held Chikage's hand.

"It's okay. Please let it all out. All your sadness. All your frustration... I'll listen to it all if it'll help you get it all off your chest..."

Chikage fell silent.

After a pregnant pause, she violently shook off Hinata's hand.

"... Leave me alone... A miko like you... has got nothing to do with me..."

And with that, Chikage headed to the hospital exit.

"Hold it, Chikage! There's no need to talk like that, is there!?"

Wakaba placed her hand on Chikage's shoulder, stopping her.

"I know you're frustrated in this situation. Of course you are! But that's no excuse to hurt someone else like that! It's difficult times like these that we really do need solidarity--"

"What a logical statement. Everything's 'logical' about you, isn't it...?"

"What?"

"You can't live on cold logic alone... Not without a thick skin... But me? I'm not as strong as you... I'm not thick skinned like you...! You have no idea what it feels like to be weak like me...!"

"... Now's not the time to whine!"

"Shut up!"



Chikage pushed Wakaba away. The sudden motion took Wakaba by surprise as she fell onto the floor alongside a nearby decorative plant. A shattered shard of the flowerpot pierced the skin of Wakaba's hand, causing red drops to scatter on the floor.

"Gh...!"

Hinata rushed over to Wakaba as she winced in pain.

"Wakaba-chan!"

"Ah..."

The sight of Wakaba's injury caused Chikage's face to tremble. She had only pushed Wakaba away impulsively and didn't mean to hurt her.

Chikage ran out of the hospital as if to run away.

"Wait, Chikage! You--"

Wakaba tried to chase after her, but was stopped by Hinata.

"You need to treat your hand first!"

"..."

Wakaba had no choice but to listen to Hinata and stop.

Chikage rushed back from the hospital to her dorm room.

"Haah, haah..."

She locked the door and plopped onto her bed.

"Takashima-san... Takashima-san, Takashima-san, Takashima-san... I need to see you..."

Yuuna was still not allowed visitors, so Chikage could not see her.

The visitor ban had been longer than the last time Yuuna had used Shuten-Doji. Perhaps it was due to her pushing herself before she had fully healed.

Without a pillar of support, Chikage's thoughts headed for a dark, gloomy direction.

"Ugghh... It's not my fault... It's not my fault... Even what happened in the hospital... That was because Nogi-san had to talk to me like that...!"

She didn't hurt Wakaba on purpose. She just pushed Wakaba away to try and get away from her. She didn't think it was enough to push her down. It was just a misfortunate coincidence that there happened to be a flowerpot there that happened to shatter and happened to pierce Wakaba's hand.

"That's right... it was just bad luck...!"

'--Yeah, that's for sure. You're totally right--'

Chikage suddenly heard a voice by her ear. She looked up in surprise.

Before she had even noticed, someone was there, right next to her bed-- Someone who looked exactly like Chikage herself.

(Ahh, I see, this is a dream... Just a bad dream...)

The girl with Chikage's form curled her lips into the shape of a crescent moon, forming a fake smile.

'--Besides, doesn't it seem a little forced how Nogi-san got injured? You expect me to believe that the strong Wakaba-san just happened to fall down that easily, and there happened to be a well-placed flowerpot there too?--'

"What are you... implying...?"

Even though she knew it was a dream, Chikage couldn't help but ask the girl who looked like her.

'--What if it was on purpose?--'

"..."

'--I'm saying Nogi-san threw herself down and hurt herself in a theatrical manner to make you out to be the bad guy.--'

"... For what purpose...?"

'--Isn't it obvious? It's so she can attack you later and claim it was under the name of justice. She's just like those jerks who hurt you in the past.--'

Chikage recalled the memories of when she had been bullied in the past.

The girl with Chikage's face whispered into her ear.

'--Nogi-san is your enemy.--'

"..."

'--Your enemy--'

Just then, Chikage's mail ringtone sounded out from her smartphone.
Chikage snapped to her senses, got up from her bed, and looked around. The girl with her face was nowhere to be found.



The curtains of the night had closed outside her window before she had realized it. Hours had already passed since she had returned. Chikage really must have fallen asleep without noticing it. That conversation really must have been a dream.

She picked her smartphone up from the table. It was mail from the Taisha.

She was going to ignore it if it were another request for her to take counseling, but that wasn't it. It was a very abrupt message.

--The Taisha hereby extends a proposal. Would you like for your parents to be moved to Marugame City so that they may live with you?

After getting her hand injury treated, Wakaba returned to her room. She puzzled over her feelings as she looked at her bandaged hand.

(I was going to chase after Chikage when she ran out of the hospital... but what exactly was I going to do once I caught up to her...?)

Wakaba had been horribly worked up when it had all happened. The blood had clearly rushed to her head when she saw Chikage's abusive attitude towards Hinata. But even with that considered, she had still acted with less composure than she usually would have.

(If Hinata hadn't stopped me, I might have ended up hurting Chikage...)

That thought sent chills down Wakaba's spine.

She realized a little bit late that even though she had gotten into an argument with Chikage, she should have said things differently. After all, she had known beforehand that Chikage was in a mentally dangerous state.

(Have I... been driven into a corner too...?)

She felt as if she were losing control of her emotions. Not a good sign.

Early in the morning, several days later, Chikage headed to her hometown to help them prepare to move to Marugame City.

She sat in her seat in the express train, passing the time away with her handheld game system. But she just couldn't get into her usual mood. She couldn't concentrate, and she kept making several misplays.

She turned off her game system and closed her eyes.

As a minor, it would only be natural for Chikage to live with her parents, and it would help her developmentally in physical and emotional health... or so the Taisha said. But basically, that meant that they wanted to build a foundation of support for her. Even Chikage could imagine why.

'--The Taisha don't want to loose their precious tool, that's all. They're just using you. No Taisha member, no adult is on your side.--'

It was the voice she heard in her dream. The voice of the girl who had her face.

She had started to hear that voice again and again after that day. Even though she was just a character in Chikage's dream, she had started talking in reality.

(Shut up... Shut up...)

Or was this even reality? Was the dream continuing into reality? Was the girl who had her form reality? Was this a dream?

She couldn't think straight.

The day Chikage left for her hometown, a flustered Hinata visited Wakaba's room.

"Wakaba-chan! I just got contacted by the Taisha...!"

"What happened"

"They've figured something about about the trump card's effects..."

Hinata was rarely ever as flustered as she was when she explained to Wakaba what the Taisha had told her.

As a result of their examinations of Wakaba, Chikage, as well as Yuuna, the Taisha had uncovered a new truth about the effects of imbuing the human body with fairies.
There were both physical and supernatural effects.

For the physical effect, the use of strength beyond the limits of the human body caused damage and destruction to the muscles, bones, and internal organs. This physical effect had already been known. The new discovery was the supernatural effect.

"To imbue the human body with fairies-- is to come in contact with the inhuman. When that happens, the human body accumulates a 'bad something'. In olden days, words like miasma or impurity were used to describe it."

Since many Taisha members were part of the Shinto priesthood, imbuing the body with the inhuman had been rumored to be dangerous. But it is impossible to quantify miasma or impurity, and thus, the danger was not taken as seriously as the physical burden placed on the body.

"But thanks to Anzu-san, the Taisha began to shift their attention to it."

"Because of Anzu?"

"Yes. For a long time, Anzu-san had been observing the other heroes and keeping a note of the effects and dangers of their use of fairies in a notebook. When the Taisha saw that notebook, they began a serious investigation into the supernatural effects..."



Anzu's notebook was found when Hinata was sorting through the belongings of the deceased heroes. It was the only handwritten notebook found amongst the massive stockpiles of books that filled her shelves.

"Now that you mention it, even in her final battle, Anzu said it was dangerous to use trump cards..."

Out of all the heroes, Anzu had been the one who most strongly felt the danger of the fairies.

Furthermore, when the first perfect Vertex appeared, Yuuna imbued her body with the fierce fairy known as Shuten-Doji. The effects of the "bad something" had an obvious effect on Yuuna, apparently confirming the Taisha's suspicions of the dangers of fairies.

"So... what exactly is that effect?"

"Increased anxiety, paranoia, and aggression. Loss of self control. Fixation on negative and destructive thoughts... The report used many difficult words, but essentially, the mind becomes unstable and the person becomes more prone to reckless behavior."

"... I... see..."

Wakaba's destabilizing emotions and increased irritability were perhaps an effect of the repeated use of fairy power.

Chikage's emotional danger was perhaps caused in part by fairies too, and not simply the anxiety caused by the desperate situation.

Just then, Wakaba's smartphone rang. The screen indicated the caller was using a pay phone. Though it seemed suspicious, Wakaba picked up.

'--Hello, Wakaba-chan?--'

On the other end of the phone was Yuuna, whispering.

"Yuuna? What happened?"

'--Umm, well, I'm in the hospital, but I'm worried about you and Gun-chan... but I can't get out! And because of the whole fairy thing, Gun-chan won't pick up...--'

"Yuuna, calm down. Just what are you talking about?"

'--Aaahh, sorry! Umm, but we need to hurry, or the phone won't connect!--'

Yuuna's roundabout words confused Wakaba and then--

"Wakaba-chan, please leave it to me."

Hinata took the phone from Wakaba.

"Yuuna-san, please take a deep breath. Okay. You're calling from the hospital phone, right? ...Yes, I heard. Okay, so that's why you called. ... Yes, I see. I think Wakaba-chan's fine. ... Yes. ... I see..."

After talking a little bit on the phone, Hinata related what she heard from Yuuna to Wakaba.

"It seems like Yuuna-san heard about the fairy effect at the hospital too. Part of why she's not allowed visitors is out of concerns of emotional instability."

"So that was it...?"

Even the bright and positive Yuuna was subject to effects that hindered her from seeing people--The trump card's supernatural effects were not looking good.

"So it looks like Yuuna-san tried calling you and Chikage-san out of worry."

"I'm fine... for now, at least."

"Yes, I told her that. Yuuna-san's worried about Chikage, though... Apparently, she tried calling her multiple times, but she won't pick up..."

"...!"

Wakaba took her smartphone back from Hinata and spoke with Yuuna again.

"Nogi speaking. Chikage is currently heading back to her family's home in Kochi."

'--Really? Then maybe she can't pick up because she's on the train...--'

"No, she should have already gotten home long ago..."

Chikage was in an unstable mental state. She wasn't picking up.

Wakaba had a bad feeling about this.

'--There are people watching throughout the hospital at all times! I can't slip out! I don't have my smartphone either! Ah! The nurse is coming...!--'

Wakaba could hear people talking on the other side of the phone.

Apparently Yuuna had slipped through hospital surveillance to make a phone call.

"Listen, Yuuna. Don't even think about slipping out of the hospital to look for Chikage! You're seriously injured too, you know!"

'--But... Gun-chan's...--'

"I'll go. I'll head towards Chikage's place and make sure she's okay."



'--Wakaba-chan... if... anything happens, save Gun-chan. Please.--'

Yuuna pleaded.

"Leave it to me. I'm the leader, remember?"

Wakaba hung up and immediately activated the app to transform into her hero form.

"I'm heading to Chikage's place. Take care of Yuuna for me."

And with that, Hinata understood everything.

"Understood."

Wakaba opened the window and leapt outside.

She left the Marugame Castle Grounds and headed to Kochi Prefecture using tall buildings as footholds.

(Chikage just didn't realize her phone was going off... I hope... Chikage, please...!)

Chikage had arrived at her hometown's bus stop a little bit before Wakaba had left Marugame City--

But before going home, Chikage decided to take a little look around town first.

Now that her mother and father were moving to Marugame City, Chikage would likely never visit this town again. So she wanted to take one last look.

She carried her scythe in a cloth bag and walked alongside the paddy fields of young rice plants. Chikage recalled the time she came back last year.

The voices praising her as a hero. The voices acknowledging her worth. The voices that loved her.

That was what Chikage needed now.

(I'm sure... the townspeople acknowledge my worth and love me... After all, they said they were proud of me as a hero... So I'm sure...)

It was an underpopulated rural town, but Chikage deliberately chose to walk on roads where she thought she would run across people.

She was sure that if she came across any townspeople that they would approach her and call out to her like last time--

She spotted a man working the rice paddies. He noticed Chikage and turned to face her, but he did not approach her. He simply looked away and continued working the farm.

(... He's working, so it's not like he's got a choice...)

Chikage agreed with her assessment and continued walking.

Next, she saw two women around the same age as her mother walking along the other side of the street. When they noticed Chikage, they looked at her in surprise.

"Ah, Chikage-... sama. You're back?"

"Yes... I have a little business here..."

"Oh, is that so?"

And with just those few words, they slipped past Chikage and left.

(... huh?)

That was a completely different reaction from what Chikage was expecting. There was no admiration, no reverence in their voices. Just cold, distant formalities.

(Why...?)

After a bit of confusion, Chikage doubled back and tailed the women.

Once she caught sight of them again, she overheard their conversation.

"That girl's back, huh."

"She's got some guts to walk around calmly like that... especially when it's those girls' fault that people are dying."

(... huh?)

Chikage couldn't believe her ears.

(It's my fault... that people are dying...?)

The women kept talking while walking, most likely not realizing Chikage was following them.
"Since the heroes can't defeat those monsters, we've been getting injuries and casualties all over, haven't we?"

"Are they even fighting properly...?"

"Who knows... Not like they tell us anything about what they're doing and where."

"Why was that girl even chosen...? Not like her parents are worth anything..."

Chikage firmly grasped her scythe and stood still.



'--Ah, how cold of them. How damn cold of them. First it's 'Oh great hero' this and 'Oh great hero' that, and now they've turned their backs on you.--'

She heard the voice again.

(Shut up... Shut up...)

'--Nobody's on your side. Remember your childhood. Everyone is your enemy. Everyone hurt you.--'

(Shut up...!)

Chikage ran home along low-traffic paths. Along the way, her smartphone rang several times, but she was too frustrated to even look at her phone, much less pick up.

Finally, she reached her old one-story home.

In the living room was her mother on a futon and her father beside her. Her mother had been hospitalized with Uranophobia, but ever since they were set to move, she had come back home with her father.

"Chikage, you're back?"

His daughter had returned for the first time in ages, but there was not an atom of joy to be found on his face. He looked at Chikage with a blank, worn-out face.

"Your mother's on sleep medication right now... She sleeps half a day lately. It'd be bad if she went on a rampage if you woke her up, so it's best to just let her sleep."

Chikage silently listened to her father's disinterested voice. Her mother's Uranophobia had progressed to the point where she couldn't live a day-to-day life off medication.

Abruptly, and expressionlessly, her father muttered.

"Hey, Chikage... Tell me you're joking."

"Huh... about what?"

"The three of us, living together? That's impossible, you know? Just look at your mother. Does it LOOK like she's ready for a family life!? She's best off in a hospital... so why should we live together? Why now, after all this time...?"

"That's... what the Taisha decided..."

"Bullshit! Well, moving to Kagawa would be great, though. Anything to get out of this town. This shithole! The sooner we get out, the better!!"

Chikage's father shouted out in frustration.

"Just what happened here...?"

"Watch this!!"

Chikage's father picked up a bundle of paper off the table and threw it at her.

Dozens of papers, each of different materials and dimensions, scattered onto the floor. Scraps of notebook paper, stationery, backs of leaflets, copy paper-- each of them scrawled with abusive language. "Heroes are useless" "Trash breeds trash" "Village idiots" "Don't you know how to raise a daughter?" "Die" "No point in a hero who can't save shit" "Your whole family is trash"

"What... is this...?"

Chikage's voice trembled. Her eyes grew dark. Her legs quivered.

"Each and every day, these letters come pouring into the house! And it's not just letters, oh no, everyone's shit talking us behind our backs! I get dirty looks all day just walking through town.

Some aren't even ashamed to tell me directly...! Ah, I've just about had it with this town! And it's all your damn fault, Chikage! You lost! Some hero you are! You can't even protect anyone! You piece of shit!"

"...!"

The Koori family had been hated throughout town from the start. But they had gained respect from the townspeople thanks to Chikage becoming a hero.

And yet--

'--This is what heroes get for all their hard battles.--'

The voice echoed in her head again.

And then, hidden among all the abusive letters-- she found words she absolutely could not believe: "Doi and Iyojima are incompetent fools. Give us back our tax money. Heroes are worthless!"

"... The hell is that?"

Did Tamako and Anzu fight just to be told that?

They dedicated their lives and in the end, paid the ultimate sacrifice--

"And this... is how you bastards repay them...?"

'--That's bullshit--'

"We're not worthless trash--"

'--YOU are!--'



Chikage grabbed her scythe and sprang out of the house.

After leaving her house, Chikage unsheathed her scythe and walked down the road.

'--you're living off the sacrifice of heroes you're parasites living off our work and yet when the peace we earned for you starts going awry you betray us unforgivable unforgivable unforgivable why won't you praise me why won't you respect me why won't you acknowledge my worth why won't you love me if you won't acknowledge my worth if you won't love me----------Then I'll kill you)

Chikage understood now.

There wasn't ever a girl who had her face.

There wasn't ever a voice echoing inside her head.

(This is my mind's true voice...!)

Further down the road were four girls chatting as they walked. Chikage recognized them. They were the girls who bullied her in elementary school.

They noticed Chikage and stopped in their tracks, wide-eyed. If the sight of a drawn scythe with a blade as long as a man is tall wasn't enough to strike fear in them, Chikage's cold, disgusted eyes were.

"Huh-- wha-- K-Koori-... san?"

"A scythe...? Wh-what's with that...? Huh? Huh?"

The girls stood frozen in place out of confusion.

But one of them spoke up with feigned confidence to hide her fear.

"Wh-what are you even thinking...!? You can't just walk around with an open blade like that! You think you can get away with anything just because you're a hero!? Are you stupid!? Get real!"

Chikage silently listened as the girl disparaged her.

The other three girls joined in, as if inspired by their friend's show of bravado.

"You heroes aren't some special privileged class! You're just worthless!"

"Go away and try fighting those monsters for once! I guess becoming a hero didn't cure you of being a retard!"

"When you heroes fail, it makes victims out of us normal people!"

Without so much of a twitch in her face,

Chikage slowly raised her scythe,

and casually swung it down.

As if she were swatting a fly with a newspaper.

The girl closest to her had her clothes slashed from her chest to her stomach, a thin line of blood rising up to the surface of her skin.

"...eep, Noooooooooo!"

It was not a serious injury at all, but she was shocked by the sight of blood and fell to her knees.

"Eeeep...!"

One of the girls turned around and tried to escape. But the first prey to run is the first prey to be targeted.

Chikage wrapped around to where the girl was running to and tripped her with the scythe's pole end.

"Gyah!"

The girl tumbled and fell to the ground.

"P-p-please... please... please spare me...!"

The girl begged Chikage with a tear-soaked face.

Chikage gave the girl a cold glance before taking out her smartphone and activating the hero app. Her clothes transformed into her battle garb.

She then looked at the girl once more.

"Wh-what... S-spare me...! P-please, spare me..."

Chikage raised her scythe.

"Come on and fight..."

"Huh...?"

Before the girl could understand the meaning of what was said to her, Chikage sliced her cheek.

A line of blood flowed.

"Hyah, eeeeep!"

As the girl desperately held down her cheek and screamed, Chikage spoke to her expressionlessly.

"Doi-san and Iyojima-san... both stood up against fierce monsters despite hopeless odds... even when it cost them their lives... If you think you have any right to criticize us... then why don't you try fighting something overwhelmingly stronger than yourselves for once...!?"



Chikage swung down her scythe.

A red line ran down the girl's thigh.

"Hyaaaaaah!"

"Come on and fight...!"

Chikage swung down her scythe. Several strands of the girl's hair fell.

"... Fight...! Maybe then you'll understand our pain...!"

With each swing, Chikage wounded the girl's body little by little. The girl screamed like mad. But Chikage did not stop.

Chikage was intoxicated by the sensation of giving into her anger.

She felt her own mind slowly collapse.

The other three girls were either standing in place in fear or had fallen to the ground entirely.
Chikage then went for the fatal blow--

And heard the sound of metal striking metal.

Chikage's scythe had been stopped by Wakaba's sword.

"Chikage, stop!"

"Nogi... san...?"

Why was she here?

Why did she stop her?

Several questions rose up in Chikage's head, but she was in no condition to think calmly.

"Don't get in my way...!"

Chikage strengthened her grip around her scythe.

But Wakaba didn't budge either. She pushed back against the scythe with her sword. Chikage lost the power struggle and retreated several steps.

Calm down, Chikage! You're no position to think straight!"

"I know, I know...! But they betrayed us...! We've risked our lives to protect these people... and they betrayed us! ... How do you expect me to calm down...!?"

Chikage remained infuriated as she swung her scythe.

Wakaba blocked Chikage's attacks with her sword.

"No! That rage isn't how you truly feel! You're under the influence of the fairy's power!"

"What... are you talking about...!?"

She had no idea what Wakaba was saying.

Chikage could feel nothing but rage towards the selfish humans who abused the very heroes who protected them.

Chikage tried to finish passing her judgment, but Wakaba would not budge. She was strong. Strong enough to defend against all of Chikage's attacks.

"Stop already!"

"Shut... up...!"

"If you harm people, you won't be able to turn back!"

"Zip it...! Shut up! Stop talking!"

Chikage kept swinging her scythe enraged.

"They're all full of shit! Every last one...! What have we been fighting for...!? Tell me, what!? We protect them...! We protected these ungrateful bastards...! We put our lives on the line for them...! So why must they criticize us...!? If this is what it all comes down to... then there's no point in fighting, no point in protecting people...! None at all!"

"Even so, we still must protect them! We must protect those who can't protect themselves...!"

"Shut up...! Nothing's changed from back then! Nothing at all...! I became a hero...! And I still get hurt! I still get criticized...! Why, why, why!?"

"Chikage..."

"Why...!? Tell me why...! Ugh, uuughh....!"

Tears fell from Chikage's face as she swung her scythe.

"Why... why won't you fight back...!? You're way stronger than me if you even tried...!"

"How do you expect me to attack you...!?"

Wakaba would only block Chikage's scythe with her sword. She never struck back.

She was still regretting the quarrel she had with Chikage at the hospital. Though fairy influence may have caused instability in her mind, she still ended up hurting her friend.

"I have no more swords to point towards a friend!"

"You... truly... disgust me...!"

Chikage hated Wakaba.



Wakaba was always right, always strong, and always confident. She was the center of attention--

Chikage was jealous of her righteousness, her strength, her confidence, and her popularity.

So in the end, Chikage admired Wakaba.

The personification of all Chikage ever wanted to be had a name, and that name was Nogi Wakaba.

And that's what disgusted Chikage.

That's what irritated her about Wakaba.

Chikage continued to swing her scythe down at Wakaba.

"Chikage, don't lose sight of yourself...!"

"... Shut up...!"

"Yuuna told me... to save you."

"--!!"

"Nobody's worried about you more than Yuuna is... So I have to stop you. For your sake and for Yuuna's!"

The moment she heard Yuuna's name, Chikage stopped attacking.

And the moment she stopped attacking, Chikage noticed the situation around her.

Dozens of townspeople had gathered around Chikage and Wakaba, perhaps having heard the commotion.

They looked at Chikage in fear, in disgust, and in anger.

Countless eyes tormented Chikage.

A cage of eyes.

"Stop it... stop it... Don't look at me like that..."

Chikage's feet caved. She could hardly stand. Her scythe slipped out of her hands. She fell to her knees, put her hands to her head, and sobbed.

"Don't hate me... please... I'm begging you... please love me..."

All that was left was a girl crying like a child in a tear-soaked hero outfit.

And finally, Koori Chikage was brought back to Marugame City--

To be suspended and her hero system revoked.

(Chapter 15 End)



The land I was born in

was often called the village of myth.

The power I was granted at the shrine that fateful day

was a [redacted] to the imminent.

And with it, I can once again protect everyone.

I want to protect everyone.

I want to recover quickly.

Hero Record June 2019 AD

Takashima Yuuna's Record


vol.16
Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JWWORKS
Supervision by Project 2H
第十六話
―狂花―
乃木若葉は勇者である
企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JWWORKS
監修／Project 2H
©2014 Project 2H



One day in June, at 6 PM-- At Marugame Castle.

Crowds thronged at the courtyard in front of the inner citadel tower. Behind them were media crews with video cameras at the ready.

All eyes were filled with both hope and anxiety.

When the sky began to darken with the evening's madder red hue, a lone girl appeared at the entrance of the castle tower.

The girl was Nogi Wakaba.

With sword in hand and hero outfit on her body, the girl faced the people with the tower at her back.

The people stirred as they all began to notice her.

But Wakaba did nothing.

She simply stuck her sword into the soil and stood silently.

The stirring crowd eventually succumbed to the pressure of Wakaba's silence and sealed their lips.

The tension rose--

And once the tension had reached critical mass, Wakaba finally opened her lips.

"In about a month and a half, we will reach the fourth anniversary of the tragic 7/30 disaster."

The crowd watched Wakaba and listened to her words.

"Many things were stolen from us that day. Our lives, our land, and even our freedom to look up to the sky. That day, humanity's natural predator came soaring down from the sky, with strength beyond comprehension. But we would not go down without a fight. Weak we may be, but humanity possesses weapons unique to us: the weapons of wisdom and courage--"

Wakaba continued speaking, using the sheer intensity of her voice, without a megaphone.

She spoke of the cruel damage inflicted upon humanity by the monsters known as the Vertexes.

She spoke of the human endeavors to stand up against those monsters.

And finally, she spoke of the "Heroes", those who received the blessings of the land gods, strengthened by human wisdom, granting them the power to oppose the monsters.

Wakaba had been popular with the people of Shikoku, almost to the point of worship. The crowd listened so intently, they forgot to blink.

"--And now, the enemy has fortified its strength as well, forcing humanity into crisis once more. The heroes Doi Tamako and Iwojima Anzu have fallen in battle."

The truth of the heroes' deaths cast a shadow upon the faces of the audience.

But Wakaba continued all the louder.

"But we will still refuse to accept defeat! We can still reclaim what was stolen from us! And that is why we are working with the Taisha to form countermeasures. I am sure it won't be long before we find a way to turn this war on its head!"

Wakaba continued, raising her voice as loud as she could.

"Please remember! Remember the way humanity was meant to be! We trod upon the soil of Japan without fear of any natural predators! We spent our days with our friends, our family, and our lovers! Those are the days we've left behind! Those are the days we're meant to live! We're not meant to be livestock locked in a cage, waiting to be eaten by some monsters!"

With the castle tower and the evening sun at her back, the hero continued her entreaty.

All to give the people even the smallest sliver of hope.

"We the heroes have been fighting these natural predators, and we won't stop now! But do you think that makes us heroes anything special? Well I think not! No, I know for a fact-- That a parent would risk their lives to fight a predator if it meant protecting their children! I know for a fact-- That a friend would put themselves in danger if it meant saving a friend seeking refuge from outside of Shikoku! I know for a fact-- That if a patient suffering from Uranophobia Syndrome saw a child about to get hit by a car outside their front door, they would overcome their fear and rush to the rescue! I know-- that police officers and JSDF personnel volunteer themselves to exceedingly dangerous surveillance duty outside the barrier in the Seto Inland Sea! Each and every one of us has the courage to stand up against our natural predators! Each and every one of us is a hero! And as long as every one of us in Shikoku is a hero, we cannot, and will not lose to the monsters!!"

The sounds of applause and cheers rang out from within the crowd.

Wakaba unsheathed her sword and held it skyward.

"The courage to face our enemy!! The courage to save our friends!! The courage to accept our sadness!! The courage to remember our pain!! The courage to keep fighting!! I repeat, we are not livestock locked in a cage, waiting to be eaten by some monsters! Each and every one of us is a hero, working for a future where we can reclaim everything the invaders stole from us!!"

For just one moment, Wakaba's words paused. A look of intense rage and regret crossed her face.

"... And under no circumstances will I ever forgive those who stole my friends from me. I swear-- I'll make sure those monsters get their just reward."

Unlike the rest of her speech, these words seemed aimed more towards herself than towards her audience.

But the shift in Wakaba's expression and voice was only for a moment.

Her voice then regained its volume and once again spoke words to inspire the people--



The hero Nogi Wakaba's speech began in the evening and lasted for about half an hour.

After the speech, Wakaba returned to her dorm room and laid her head on Hinata's lap.

"Good job today. It must've been tough shouting the whole time, huh?"

"Yeah... But it was worthwhile if it made the people at least somewhat more optimistic. Still..."

Wakaba spoke ambiguously.

Today's speech was meant to raise the morale of the people after the news of the hero deaths and rising Vertex damage broke.

Wakaba wrote a rough draft for the speech, but the content was entirely rewritten by the Taisha.

The staging of the speech at Marugame Castle at evening was also a production decision mad by the Taisha. Furthermore, Wakaba's posture, hand gestures, as well as the timing of her pauses and her vocal emphasis were also practiced and trained in detail. Every small detail was apparently planned in order to maximize the speech's psychological effect on the populace.

The whole production seemed to be a success, as the audience appeared excited. Some people even cried.

But as for Wakaba, she could not shake the guilty feeling that she was deceiving everyone.

One line of the Taisha-revised speech had touched upon the topic of Suwa: "Before long, we may even join with Suwa's hero in a united front." However, Wakaba deliberately failed to speak about that topic.

Since the Taisha did not want to let the citizens know about the annihilation of Suwa, they probably wanted to use that line as a morale booster. But Wakaba couldn't find it in her to use Shiratori's name to deceive the people.

Furthermore-- Wakaba's aside about swearing revenge on the Vertexes was not scripted by the Taisha.

That was undeniably Wakaba's true intention.

"Wakaba-chan, your speech has been playing over and over on the news. It's going to be on the front page of tomorrow's newspapers too."

"Yeah..."

Hinata gently stroked Wakaba's sullen head.

Hinata was laden with complex feelings as well.

The only three remaining heroes were Wakaba, Yuuna, and Chikage. But Yuuna was too injured to participate in battle, and Chikage was under house arrest with her hero app and weapon confiscated, leaving her deprived of her hero power. So in effect, the only one capable of fulfilling hero duties was Wakaba.

The Taisha burdened Wakaba with the wills of the deceased and hospitalized heroes and were trying to use her as a symbol of hope. To do so, they used Wakaba's popularity throughout Shikoku and manipulated all information sent out to the media. All to keep the people of Shikoku out of despair.

"I wonder how Chikage's doing..."

After Wakaba muttered in concern, Hinata spoke up reassuringly.

"I'm sure she's fine..."

"Chikage's rampage was due to fairy influence. It's not like it's entirely her fault. At least that's what the Taisha have been saying..."

Wakaba had filed requests for Chikage's punishment to be light and to not drive her any further into the corner.

But Wakaba was not informed as to what extent the Taisha had heeded those requests.

Hinata was not informed of the Taisha's decision either.

(Perhaps the Taisha doesn't have much trust in me either... Maybe because I've been to close with the heroes and all...)

Anything the Taisha told Hinata would inevitably reach the heroes as well. Thus, there were many things the Taisha would not tell her.

The Koori family was granted a house in Marugame where Chikage lived with her mother and father.

Her mother was currently in Stage 3 of Uranophobia, and thus was unable to live daily life without medication. She slept half of the day with sleep medication in order to maintain mental tranquility and was nursed by Chikage, her father, and agents sent from the Taisha.

It was nothing short of agony for Chikage to watch her mentally unstable mother and her stressed out father trying to take care of her.

So she locked herself up in her room as much as she could, only leaving when absolutely necessary. She was in her room today as well, watching TV blankly sprawled out on top of her bed. Every now and then, she would hear her mother screaming from outside her room, and her dad and a caregiver try to calm her down.

The TV news was broadcasting Wakaba giving her speech from Marugame Castle.

Chikage was made painfully aware of her own misery. Smartphone footage of Chikage's rampage at her hometown had been uploaded to the internet. In the video, Wakaba looked like a true symbol of bravery and justice by protecting the townspeople and trying to stop Chikage. Furthermore, Wakaba's encouraging speech as a representative of the heroes and of the Taisha had been playing over and over on the news these past few days, even making the newspapers. She was now almost deified by the people of Shikoku.



Many people were still critical of the heroes and the Taisha, but they were almost completely drowned out by those praising Wakaba. Wakaba had become the charismatic leader of the cornered humanity.

She was loved and adored as a figure of hope.

(And compared to her... I'm just...)

Power-stripped and empty-handed. The berserk hero hated by humanity. Under house arrest and allowed no visitors.

She had lost her worth, her fame, and her friends.

"Ugh..."

How did things turn out like this?

Where did she go wrong?

"Gh... uugh...!"

Tears warped her vision.

"Takashima-san... Takashima-san... Takashima-san..."

She wanted someone to understand her feelings.

she wanted to talk with someone who could provide mental support.

Chikage left her room on unsteady feet.

To the Taisha-affiliated hospital where -she- was hospitalized--

That was the plan.

Since Yuuna was no longer banned from having visitors, Chikage thought she'd be able to see her.

After leaving her house, Chikage avoided public notice by walking down paths with zero foot traffic.

She was, after all, under house arrest, so she wasn't supposed to be allowed outside. Besides, her rampage incident made people fear her, so it would cause an uproar if someone saw her.

She had to walk stealthily in the shadows where nobody could see her.

(How... sad...)

She would likely never regain the respect and love that came with being a hero ever again.

In that case, just what exactly was she living for?

Even if she died, there probably wouldn't be anybody to mourn her death, just like what happened with Anzu and Tamako.

If she entered the hospital through the front entrance, the receptionist would spot her, so Chikage entered through the back entrance. She walked cautiously so that the hospital staff wouldn't find her.

She already knew where Yuuna's room was. Once she somehow managed to get there without anyone spotting her, she knocked on the door.

But there was no answer.

She quietly opened the door, but there was nobody inside.

(Is she... out...?)

That couldn't be. Yuuna couldn't have recovered enough to go outside the hospital. At most, she could perhaps walk through the garden. She'd be back before long, so Chikage thought she could just wait in the room for her to get back-- but as soon as that thought crossed her mind, she heard a familiar coming from down the hallway.

"Ahahah... But... awwrighty, I'll do my best!"

It was Yuuna.

Just hearing that voice was enough to clear up some of Chikage's gloomy mood.

Yuuna's voice came from the "physical practice room"-- the room for physical rehabilitation. Chikage went to the physical practice room door and peeked in.

"Takashima-sa-- ah...."

But Chikage swallowed her words halfway.

Yuuna wasn't alone in the room; Wakaba was with her. Yuuna was squeezing a hand-sized ball over and over, perhaps for arm rehabilitation. Wakaba was beside her, apparently counting how her reps.

Without thinking, Chikage hid behind the corner of the door.

(Wait... why am I hiding...?)

She could've easily just gone and talked to them.

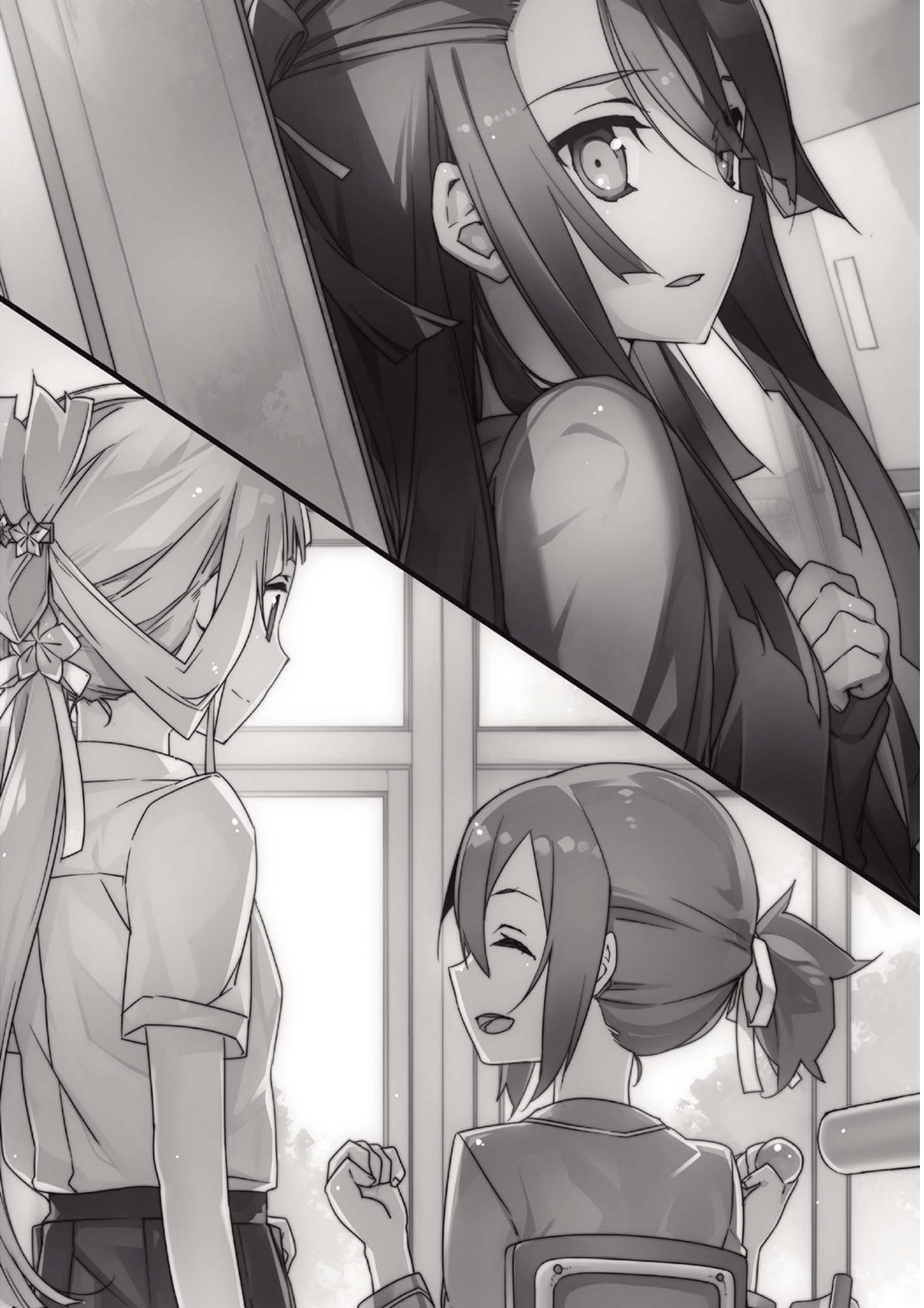
But for some reason, she hesitated.

She kept peeking at Yuuna and Wakaba from behind the door.

She couldn't hear what they were saying clearly. Just bits and pieces.

"But... couldn't help it. So..."

"Come on, Wakaba-chan... Yeah, me too... I'm sure if we all... ... you know!"



Wakaba crossed her arms in thought and started talking about something with a stumped look on her face. Yuuna continued her arm rehab while smiling at Wakaba's words and nodding encouragingly. It appeared Wakaba was consulting Yuuna about something and Yuuna was providing answers.

As she watched the exchange-- Chikage felt all too deeply torn.

Yuuna and Wakaba were fellow heroes, strong, brave, and charming, both of equal standing.

(But... I'm nothing like that...)

She was gloomy, weak, and not even a hero now.

(I... don't belong with them...)

At that moment, perhaps noticing a presence at the door, Wakaba turned around and saw Chikage.

"Ah... Chikage!"

"Gun-chan!?"

Yuuna noticed Chikage too and tried to get up from her chair. But perhaps since her body wasn't in perfect condition, she lost her balance.

"Watch ou--"

Chikage reflexively rushed up to Yuuna, but Wakaba caught Yuuna since she was next to her.

"You okay, Yuuna?"

"Yeah, thanks, Wakaba-chan."

Upon seeing that happen,

Chikage turned around and made a mad dash as if to escape from something.

"Chikage! Where are you going!?"

Wakaba called out to Chikage, but she ran off without stopping.

"What do you think is up with Gun-chan...?"

A puzzled look spread across Yuuna's face.

"Hmm... Well, there's something I want to talk about with Chikage too..."

Wakaba was worried about Chikage too since the house arrest meant she couldn't see her. She had no idea why Chikage had come to the hospital, but Wakaba wanted to make sure she was okay.

"Aww, and we were just talking about how we were all going to go to the Taisha and tell them it wasn't Gun-chan's fault..."



"Yeah..."

That was the reason Wakaba had gone to see Yuuna today. To talk about the plan for Yuuna, Hinata, and Wakaba to try petitioning the Taisha one more time to lighten Chikage's punishment.

Chikage ran away from the rehab room. She had completely forgotten that she needed to remain hidden.

Wakaba and Yuuna looked like they were enjoying a fun conversation.

Wakaba caught Yuuna when she lost her balance.

(There's no room for me... in their world...!)

Chikage had lost everything as a hero. The power, the praise, and the respect. The last thing she had left was a place she belonged. But Wakaba had stolen that from her as well.

Hatred began to shroud Chikage's mind.

"You're... Koori-san!?"

A nurse had noticed her walking in the hall.

"What are you doing here!?" "Koori-san, wait right there!" "Somebody come help!"

Hospital staff members gathered one after the other, trying to catch Chikage. Chikage pushed a security guard and tried to escape, but without her scythe or transformation app, Chikage was only as strong as an ordinary girl. She was caught all too easily.

A crowd surrounded her and held her down--

Just like a scene from a criminal justice TV show.

(Why... why does it have... to be this way...!?)

Taisha personnel forcibly took Chikage back to her home.

Her father looked like he wanted to say something, but Chikage was in no mood to talk. She simply locked herself in her room.

"Uwaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!!"

She fell to her knees on the floor and wrung her lungs out in a cry.

Afterwards, Chikage got up on unsteady feet and destroyed everything in her room. She threw her game consoles and handheld systems at the wall until they shattered. She tore up her bed and cushions with a box cutter. She flipped her bookshelf and trampled on the scattered books until they became a crumpled mess. She swung her chair at the table and smashed her laptop into her TV.

"Haah, haah, haah, haah...!!"

Chikage stood still inside her wreck of a room.

"... I've lost... everything... Everything... was stolen from me..."

And now there was someone who had everything Chikage had lost.

"I'll take it back... I'll take everything back... I swear..."

Chikage took out her smartphone and began typing out a message to the Taisha:

"I've had plenty of time to rest, and as you can see, I've calmed down now. I've reflected deeply and now regret the incident I caused the other day--""

The next day--

Once again, only Wakaba and Hinata showed up at school in Marugame Castle.

Classes continued as usual, even with only the two of them.

During lunch break, Wakaba and Hinata talked as they ate udon in the dining room.

"Chikage-san... still hasn't been released from house arrest, huh?"

"They should at last let her come to school. She'd feel a lot better here than just staying secluded at home all day...."

"I'm worried. This isn't the best time for--"

As if to interrupt Hinata, an alarm rang from Wakaba's smartphone.

Wakaba looked up to see Hinata had frozen in place. No, it wasn't just inata. Not even the hands on the clock were moving.

"Forestization...!?"

Wakaba activated her transformation app and flew out of the dining room as her clothes changed into her hero outfit.

As she got outside, the sight of Shikoku coated in vegetation came into view. From far in the distance, she could see a white horde of Vertexes approaching.

Now, Wakaba was the only hero able to fight. Could she win against the monsters all alone?

(But failure is not an option...)

If Wakaba lost here, nobody else could stand up against the Vertexes--

At that moment, a lone girl landed right next to her.

"I'm... here too..."



It was a black-haired girl in a red-themed hero outfit, carrying a large scythe like a grim reaper-- Koori Chikage.

Apparently Chikage's house arrest had been rescinded, and her scythe and transformation app had been returned. The Taisha had fast-tracked Chikage's reinstatement due to the danger of having Wakaba fight alone.

"Sorry for all the trouble I caused... I'm okay now..."

"I see... That's good."

Wakaba smiled in relief.

And thus, the two of them focused their sights on the horde of Vertexes approaching from the Seto Inland Sea.

Wakaba had thought it'd be difficult to fight them all alone. But now that she had an ally, the story was different. Since Yuuna had been hospitalized, Wakaba and Chikage had been defending Shikoku as a pair in the meanwhile.

"I'm going on ahead!"

Wakaba kicked off the ground and launched herself towards the white monsters. She drew her sword and cut down enemy after enemy.

The Vertexes' numbers weren't particularly greater than usual, but by no means could they let their guard down. The Vertexes had the power to corrode the Jukai. And corrosion to the Jukai resulted in harm to the people of Shikoku.

Short, decisive battles were key.

(Should I use a trump card...?)

Wakaba hesitated for a second, but decided she could manage with her usual strength for now.
Now that they knew the effects of fairy power were more than just physical, the risk of using them was too great even if they did help make short, decisive battles.

Wakaba defeated the Vertexes one after another. Chikage mauled down enemies with her scythe as well.

Victory was within sight.

(Alright, let's keep up the pace--)

Just then, something black caught Wakaba's eye.

"!?"

Long before she could identify what it was, Wakaba dodged it instinctively. Had she been one moment too late, she would've been fatally wounded.

The black object was Chikage's scythe.

Chikage had swung her scythe's blade at Wakaba.

"Of course you would... Totally thought I had it, though..."

"!? Chikage, what's the meaning of this!?"

"Tell me, Nogi-san... It's absurd, don't you think...? Everyone loves you... but they all... shun me... they hate me..."

Chikage began muttering as if in soliloquy.

"Chikage... What's wrong? Get a hold of yourself!"

Wakaba kept cutting down the oncoming Vertexes as she called out to Chikage.

"Why... did things turn out this way...? I know..."

Chikage shut her eyes and began speaking with cold, machine-like monotony.

"It's all because of you."

She continued speaking with her eyes shut.

"If there were only one hero... If only I were around... and you were gone... then the people would have no choice but to count on me... I'd have a place by Takashima-san's side... Everyone's praise for you... their love for you... would all be for me... I'll stand in the place you stand now...!"

Chikage's hero outfit transformed.

And the next moment, seven Chikages appeared, surrounding Wakaba.

"You used fairy power!?"

Wakaba raised her voice.

One of the seven Chikages slashed her scythe at Wakaba.

"!!"

Wakaba parried the first Chikage's attack with her sword. Immediately afterwards, two Chikage's swung their scythes from the sides simultaneously. Wakaba blocked the right one with her sword and dodged the left one with a twist of her body. But she was unable to dodge as a fourth Chikage slashed Wakaba's back.

"Ghhh...!"

Wakaba's face warped in pain.



The sight gave Chikage a dark joy.

Just like the time she rampaged in her hometown, her mind was soaked in hatred and she could feel it crumble. 'Erase Nogi Wakaba and you'll be a loved and respected hero.' -- said another Chikage inside her head.

The fairy's influence was eating awaway at Chikage's mind all the more.

"'Ohohagari' (大葉刈, the Great Leaf Reaper)... The spiritual power imbued within this scythe fits me perfectly now...!"

The Ohohagari-- the unpleasant blade was used by a land god to cut down his friend's mourning hut.

And thus, it was a suitable weapon to kill an ally.

The seven Chikages kept swinging their scythes at Wakaba.

"Ghhh!"

Wakaba leapt away, trying to escape the seige of Chikages.

But the Chikages remained hot on Wakaba's pursuit.

Even as Wakaba fled, the Vertexes continued to attack her. As Wakaba dealt with the Vertexes, the Chikages caught up to her and surrounded her again.

"I... will take... your place...!"

Chikage relentlessly swung her scythes.

No matter how proficient Wakaba was in martial arts, there was nothing she could do to perfectly dodge all of the seven Chikages' simultaneous attacks.

The longer Wakaba desperately warded off attacks, the more her body got wounded.

"You... if it weren't for you...!! I was loved...!!"

Chikage's sorrowful cries echoed.

With each scythe swing she took, Wakaba felt Chikage's anguish and sorrow.

(What... should I have done...?)

Every memory she spent with Chikage ran through Wakaba's brain.

When they first met, there had perhaps been some discord between them. But lately, they had worked it out and connected their hearts as friends, or so she had thought.

And yet-- now Wakaba was nothing more to Chikage than a target of her hatred and killing intent.

(Why... did things have to be this way...!?)

There must have been some way to have gotten along better with Chikage.

There must have been some way to have been friends with her.

Was there something she did wrong?

Or was this fate-- an unfortunate future fated from the beginning?

(Why...)

As she sustained Chikage's attacks, Wakaba began cranking out thoughts.

But she could not find an answer. There was no answer to be found.

"Checkmate...!"

Slowed down by her self-doubt, Wakaba found herself flanked by three Chikages swinging their scythes from the left, right, and top.

Without any gas in timing or angle for Wakaba to dodge, the fatal flurry of scythe swings came down upon her.

"Huh...!?"

But what happened the next instant was not Wakaba's death, but an anomaly that astonished even Chikage.

The three Chikages that swung their scythes at Wakaba vanished-- or rather, a total of six of the seven Chikages vanished. Scattered like flower petals in an instant.

(My... fairy...!?)

Chikage could not understand what had happened.

Wakaba didn't seem to understand the situation either, as she had a perplexed look on her face.

(... Doesn't matter! I don't need fairy power...!)

Chikage continued to swing her scythe out of hatred. But immediately, her hero outfit itself disappeared, leaving Chikage standing in the Jukai in her school uniform.

"Wh-what...!?"

Chikage was confused as to what was happening to her own body.

She couldn't easily swing her scythe as she usually could. It felt like a heavy lump of metal, which she dropped, because she could not even hold it up.



(My hero power... disappeared...!?)

"Chikage!? What happened!?"

Chikage couldn't answer Wakaba's question, as not even she knew what was going on with her own body.

Chikage took out her smartphone and in a panic, she tried to activate the transformation app over and over, but she could not transform.

"Why won't... it work...!? I can't transform... I can't become a hero...!!"

For some unknown reason, Chikage had completely lost all power as a hero.

The Vertexes swarmed Chikage. A lone, now defenseless girl would be nothing but easy food for the monsters--

--normally, that is.

"Haah!"

Wakaba swung her sword, cutting down all the monsters swarming towards Chikage.

Wakaba shielded her.

"Chikage, don't you dare leave my side!"

"Huh...?"

As Chikage looked in confusion, Wakaba kept fighting while protecting her. Wakaba slew the countless Vertexes without leaving Chikage's side for a moment.

Fighting the Vertexes without moving from the same spot was far more difficult than fighting them in motion. Mobility was one of the most powerful weapons that separated the heroes from the Vertexes.

Without it, the heroes were susceptible to concentrated attacks from all sides.

Without her hero powers, Chikage had pretty much lost all of her mobility. If Wakaba were to move around, Chikage would be unable to keep up. Thus, Wakaba had no choice but to fight in place at Chikage's side.

"Why..? Why... are you... protecting me...?"

Chikage could not understand. She had attacked Wakaba with the intent to kill.

"Why? Isn't it obvious? Because we're friends!"

"Huh...?"

"Because we're friends!! No matter what you do, you're my friend!! So I'll protect you!! No matter what!!"

"Nogi... san..."

In order to withstand the tempest of Vertex attacks, Wakaba activated a trump card, imbuing her body with Yoshitsune's power to fight.

But even so, the battle conditions were overwhelmingly unfavorable.

Some of the Vertexes became an evolved form, firing countless arrows at Wakaba from a distance. She deflected the arrows with her sword, but each arrow deflected meant another attack she could not perform.

"Raaahhhh!"

Wakaba grabbed an arrow out of the air with her bare hand. The friction of the arrow split the skin on her palm, causing her to bleed. But nevertheless, she hurled the arrow back. Wakaba's repurposed arrow pierced the evolved Vertex's body.

"Haah... haaah...!"

Wakaba's breathing grew rough. In addition to the exhaustion from using a trump card, she was under concentrated enemy fire, giving her not a moment's rest. She was building fatigue at an alarming rate.

But nevertheless, Wakaba protected Chikage.

In Chikage's eyes, Wakaba was a true hero of legend.

As she watched Wakaba's never-ending fight, Chikage thought to herself--

(Why... couldn't I be like that...)

Was it because the influence of fairy power brought her to mental instability?

No, Wakaba had been using fairy power just as much as Chikage had.

Was it due to her unfortunate background? No, everyone who had lived through the day the Vertexes first invaded had an unfortunate background. Including Wakaba.

(In the end... I... was just weak...)

The only problem was in Chikage's mind.

(But in that case--)

If the problem was only in her mind--

(Then I too... can be like Nogi-san...!)

Wakaba's concentration paused for a moment out of exhaustion, leaving her open. A Vertex took the opportunity to snap at her.



"Nogi-san!"

Chikage pushed Wakaba, saving her from the enemy's attack.

--but not without a great cost.

In Wakaba's place, Chikage became Vertex food.

"AAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!"

As the monster bit into her, Chikage let out an intense, painful cry.

"Chikage!!"

Wakaba cut down that Vertex posthaste, but from Chikage's body was tattered from her shoulder down her side. Her flesh was gouged, her bones fractured and exposed. Her internal organs were likely done for as well.

(Ahh... crap... This wound is... but... it doesn't... hurt... anymore...)

Chikage's consciousness faded into the distance.

In her blurred vision, she saw Wakaba roaring as she fought.

Even now, Wakaba still stayed in place, protecting Chikage.

(... It's... okay now... I'm... beyond... help... So there's... no need... to protect me anymore... I'm sorry... Nogi-san... I'm sorry... for everything... I've done...)

And then Chikage's consciousness cut out.

By the time she regained consciousness, the surrounding Jukai disappeared, leaving Chikage on the ground in Marugame Castle's inner citadel.

The sun had began to set, leaving the area seeped in the color of the evening.

Not one Vertex remained.

And standing before Chikage's eyes was a heavily wounded Wakaba.

(Amazing... she really... did it...)

Wakaba had annihilated every last Vertex.

All while protecting Chikage, without moving a single step.

"Chikage, we need to get you to the hospital...!"

Wakaba held Chikage with both hands. But Chikage could not even feel them. Her entire body had already gone numb.

The fact that she couldn't even feel the warmth of Wakaba's hands... was a little sad.

"... It's... no use... It's something of a miracle... that I'm even alive right now..."

"Don't say that!"

The tone of Wakaba's shout alone made it clear that Chikage's wounds were beyond medical help. As she lay in Wakaba's arms, Chikage could see the evening town and sea spreading out from beneath Marugame Castle.

Chikage knew that every day, Wakaba would come to this inner citadel to gaze upon the Seto Inland Sea.

"... Let me... rest like this... just a while longer... It'll be hard... to carry me..."

"Then I'll call for a medical team here!"

Wakaba took out her smartphone as her body trembled in sorrow.

(I thought... that if I died... nobody would mourn me...)

Chikage wanted to be loved.

She thought that if she strove as a hero, she would prove her worth and be loved by others.

So she fought, and fought...

When unbeatable Vertexes appeared-- when she lost her hero power-- when people stopped loving her-- she had thought she had lost everything.

But in truth, she didn't.

The days they spent in Marugame castle together--

The udon they ate together. The Vertexes they fought together. The hot-spring trip they spent together. The games they played together. The leisurely hours they spent together.

Regardless of her hero power, or her Vertex fights, Chikage's friends had loved her as a friend.

(... I'm such... an idiot...)

If only she had made that realization--

Chikage would probably have been satisfied.

She would have been satisfied just being loved by her friends.

"... Tell Takashima-san... thanks... for everything..."



The truth was Chikage wanted to see her once more. But-- she thought she no longer had the time, nor the qualification to do so.

"Chikage...!"

The teardrops spilling from Wakaba's eyes fell onto her smartphone.

And then-- With the last of her strength, Chikage told her.

She told Wakaba the one thing she never could before.

"... Nogi-san.. I... hate you..."

"I know..."

"But... I adore you... just as much..."

"..."

"I loved... you..."

Wakaba said nothing and simply held Chikage's body in a tight embrace.

I'm glad that in the end, I got to see the same sight in the same place as you--

But those words never left her lips.

Chikage smiled and closed her eyes as if to sleep.

(Chapter 16 END)



[redacted] was a hero,

And I'll never forget that.

In the end,

she surely overcame herself.

Hero Record July 2019 AD

Nogi Wakaba's Record


vol.17
Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JWWORKS
Supervision by Project 2H
第十七話
―弔花―
企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JWWORKS
監修／Project 2H
©2017 Project 2H
乃木若葉は勇者である



Underneath the moonlight-- Hinata walked along the sandy shoal dressed in her miko garb, offering up a ritual prayer.

It was a purification ceremony.

Hinata had again requested to be the one to cleanse Chikage's corpse. And thus, Hinata first had to purify her own body.

Immediately following the report of Chikage's death, Taisha headquarters dispatched Shinto priests to begin the post-mortem procedures. The plan was to cleanse Chikage's body overnight and carry out the funeral service the next morning.

Hinata's voice quivered as she recited the prayer.

(Why... must things be so cruel...?)

Wakaba had told her how Chikage had behaved in the forestized world. But by no means could Chikage's rampage have been of her own volition.

Tamako, Anzu, Chikage.

The lives of three girls had been lost.

Had they lived normal lives, in a normal time--

The boisterous Tamako would be dragging Anzu every which way as Chikage would begrudgingly play along.

All three of them would still be alive.

Meanwhile, Wakaba was in Yuuna's hospital room.

"Gun-chan..."

"..."

Yuuna sat up in bed as she listened to Wakaba's report. Her report of Chikage's death.

Yuuna's head was down, obscuring her face, but her fists were clenched tight.

"I'm getting discharged soon... so I thought we'd be able to hang out again..."

"... I'm sorry..."

Wakaba felt responsible for Chikage's death. This wouldn't have happened had she been more attentive to Chikage's dangerous mental state. This wouldn't have happened had she been strong enough to guarantee Chikage was safe from the Vertexes.

"It's not your fault at all, Wakaba-chan."

Yuuna spoke with a stiff smile, but quickly cast her head down again.

"I'm sorry... Wakaba-chan. But I think... we've had enough for today..."

"... Okay..."

Wakaba stood up and left Yuuna's hospital room.

After she closed the door, Wakaba's back slumped against the wall as she sank to the floor.

She could hear Yuuna sobbing from across the other side.

The hallway of the hospital at night was artificially lit to an almost sterile white brightness.

Wakaba felt as if that all-too-pure whiteness was laughing at them.

"Ghh...!"

Wakaba lacked the motivation to get up, and so she just sat there for an extended period of time.

Early morning the next day, Wakaba was alone in the Marugame Castle classroom.

Classes were canceled that day due to Chikage's funeral, but Wakaba could not break the habit of organizing the blackboard chalk or replacing the water in the vases.

Wakaba had always been the first to get to class. That punctuality garnered Wakaba sparked a competitive spirit in Tamako to be the first one to get to class, but perhaps because she was not a morning person, Tamako could never arrive before Wakaba.

--Wakaba got here first again today, huh. Well, Tama's gonna be first tama-rrow for sure!

Around two months had already passed since Tamako and Anzu had passed away. Yet Wakaba still felt like any minute now, that door would swing wide open, and in would rush Tamako, with Anzu not to far behind.

Just then, the classroom door suddenly opened.

"...!"

It was Hinata.

"Oh, Hinata. Good morning."

Wakaba was unsure if her greeting had looked natural.

"Yes... Good morning to you too."

A look of distraught indignation spread on Hinata's face as she spoke. It was rare for her to look that way.



"What's wrong, Hinata? Did something happen?"

"Chikage-san's funeral... has been canceled."

"Huh...!? Why!?"

"Apparently, the Taisha has come to the decision that Chikage-san cannot be given a funeral service as a hero... so they want a private service at her home rather than with the Taisha..."
"...!?"

Wakaba had not reported Chikage's violent rampage during forestization, but the Taisha had found out.

Chikage had created a scandal in her hometown and had been close to losing her qualifications as hero. And now she had attacked Wakaba. The reason Chikage lost her hero powers immediately prior to death was because the Shinju had forsaken her-- That was what the Taisha had concluded.
And apparently, they had decided to dishonorably discharge her as a hero as a result.

"That's ridiculous! That wasn't Chikage's fault, you know!? What gives!?"

"I don't agree with the decision either...! But the Taisha probably doesn't want to defile the sanctity of the 'heroes' as an entity..."

"...!"

"The decision has already been set..."

Wakaba slammed her fist on a desk.

"I am a hero"

That thought resonated with Chikage more than anyone else. It was her source of pride. Her mental pillar of support. And yet that pillar of support had been pulled out from under her dead body.

(That's just cruel...)

Chikage's corpse was handed over to her family. What happened to her afterwards was unknown to Wakaba and the others. The Taisha would not tell them when the funeral service was to be held, nor what sort of service it was to be, leaving the others unable to even mourn for her.

Several days passed--

Yuuna was discharged and returned to the classroom.

"Good morning! Wakaba-chan! Hina-chan!"

Yuuna's first words upon returning to school were used for a hearty greeting.

A greeting refreshing enough to completely blow away the stagnant atmosphere that had been accumulating the past few days Wakaba and Hinata were alone.

"Yuuna, you've been discharged?"

"Yup! Good as new!"

Yuuna made a peace sign.

"That's great. Welcome back, Yuuna-san."

"I'm back! Now where's my welcome hug?"

Yuuna and Hinata hugged each other. Afterwards, Yuuna and Wakaba hugged as well.

"Man, my body's gotten all out of shape from being in the hospital! I wanna get back to training right away, so how about we go at it later, okay, Wakaba-chan?"

Yuuna was so bright, it was unnatural. Perhaps she was trying to force herself to cheer up from the depression Chikage's death had brought.

In that case, Wakaba and Hinata decided to join in.

After all, a false sense of cheerfulness was better than no cheerfulness at all.

"Yeah, count me in, Yuuna! I won't go easy on you just because it's rehab."

"Bring it!"

"In that case, Yuuna-san, let me take a picture to commemorate your recovery-- wait, huh?"

Hinata tried to take a picture with her smartphone, but tilted her head in confusion.

"... Ah, it seems my memory card is full."

Hinata started flipping through memory cards as she piled them up on top of her desk.

"That's a lot!"

Yuuna's eyes widened in surprise.

"Are all of these for pictures...?"

"Yes. Everything starting from Wakaba-chan's baby pictures!"

Hinata proudly boasted.

"Baby pictures? But Hinata, you were a baby then too? Babies don't have smartphones, so how..."

"I've digitized all the photo albums in your house."

"When!?"



Around two thirds of the memory cards were labeled with a month, year, and the name "Wakaba-chan" written in small letters. But the remaining third only had a month and year. And those cards only seemed to start around the year 2015.

"What about these ones without Wakaba-chan's name on them?"

Yuuna picked up one such memory card.

"Those ones have pictures of all of us."

Hinata inserted the card into her smartphone and flipped through the photos one by one.

"Ah! This one's from when we all first came to Marugame Castle! That brings me back!"

Yuuna spoke happily as she looked at the picture on the smartphone.

The photo showed six girls in Marugame Castle, all elementary students.

Six girls who were brought into Marugame Castle not fully grasping the entire extent of the circumstances that brought them there. Everyone looked bewildered. These girls had just met and still had not talked with each other much.

Hinata swiped her phone screen.

The next photo was of the first time they all went out for udon.

"Here. This place is one of the few genuine handmade shops. A rarity even in Kagawa now."

Wakaba and Hinata had taken Yuuna, Tamako, Anzu, and Chikage to a certain udon shop in the city. The four of them were from out of prefecture, so it was the first time they had eaten Kagawa udon.

Yuuna had said she wanted to eat udon, the soul food of Kagawa, so Wakaba and Hinata had taken everyone to their recommended shop. At the time, the heroes' faces had yet to be widespread through the media, so they were able to eat in peace without the other patrons causing a commotion. They merely attracted as much attention as any other large group of six elementary schoolers would.

The four out-of-towners ordered udon as recommended by Wakaba and Hinata, and as soon as they had their first mouthful of noodles, their eyes opened in surprise.

(All four): "...!?"

For a minute, everyone froze as if time had stopped.

The first to speak was Tamako.

"Wh-what!? What on earth is this majesty!? It's a tamashock! This flavor is a 30 kilotamashock!"

Tamako later explained that one tamashock was equal to the surprise you feel when you try to buy a drink at a vending machine, but open your wallet and find you only have 80 yen. Apparently, awakening to her power as a hero was merely a 27 kilotamashock for Tamako.

"Is this... *slurp*... really... *nom nom*... udon...!? It's completely different... *slurp*... from the udon I know... *gulp*, phew~"

Chikage could not hide her trembling as she spoke between bites.

"I-it's delicious!! Even though neither the ingredients nor the broth look like nothing out of the ordinary... Is this really just 350 yen a bowl!? The al dente firmness as you chew, the satisfying feeling as you swallow, the texture, it's all exquisite...! This is Sah-NOO-ki OO-dahn!!"

Yuuna gazed lovingly at the bowl of noodles as she said its name inexplicably with an English-speaking accent.

"The noodles are dancing in my mouth! Indeed, in the same way that the taste of madeleines dipped in tea sent Marcel on a journey to faraway memories of Albertine in 'In Search of Lost Time', one day in the future, I too will be sent on a journey to faraway memories by the taste of this udon...!"

Anzu's comments were becoming quickly unintelligible, but Wakaba and Hinata at least understood that she was deeply moved by the experience.

Tamako ordered two extra helpings while Yuuna ordered one.

After that day, but before the heroes' faces became well known through the media, the girls would all go to local udon shops together every now and then.

"Now that I think about it, that's when we all began to slowly open up to each other."

A nostalgic smile formed on Wakaba's lips.

"It was a real surprise how delicious it was!"

Yuuna spoke excitedly as if she had recalled her surprise at the time.

Hinata smiled.

"It made me proud of my hometown to see it make everyone so happy."

"Yeah. And I guess it was all thanks to Yuuna that we had that opportunity to break the ice. Thanks."

--Let's all go eat udon together!-- Yuuna's suggestion was what caused everyone to go out for udon and get just a little bit closer together.

Ever since then, Yuuna had been the heroes' mood maker.

Yuuna shook her head in embarrassment at Wakaba's words.

"Huh!? I just wanted to try Kagawa udon. It was really just me being a glutton."

"If you're a glutton, then what does that make Tamako?"

Wakaba smiled wryly.



"I know, how about we go visit that shop again soon?"

Hinata suggested happily.

"Mm... but if we go there now, we'd cause a commotion, wouldn't we?"

For good or for bad, the heroes were just too famous now.

"Then how about we go in disguise! I'll go wearing sunglasses!"

"Yuuna-san, you'd still get caught if you just wore sunglasses. I know, I'll do your hair in a different style and pick out a cute outfit for you... Teehee, I've only ever thought about doing this kind of thing for Wakaba-chan, but you've got a lot of potential I can work with too, Yuuna-san..."

"H-Hina-chan? You look kind of scary right now..."

Yuuna's face stiffened.

Afterwards, Hinata swiped her phone screen once more to show more pictures one by one.

Since they went to a school with only six students, they had no big events like sports day or culture festivals.
Even so, Hinata had an extensive photo catalog of the six girls' daily life.

Hinata's phone screen showed a picture of Tamako carrying a sleeping Anzu on her back.

"Oh right... that happened."

"That's when An-chan went missing, huh."

That was another event that occurred quite a while before the Vertexes began invading Shikoku.

One day, Anzu hadn't returned to the dorm even after curfew.

The other girls and the teachers went searching downtown.

Tamako was especially worried, thinking she might have been kidnapped.

"Tama swore to protect Anzu...!"

Tamako continued searching for Anzu, feeling irritated at herself.

Long after the sun had set, Tamako had been the one to find Anzu. She had apparently fallen asleep with a book on her lap after reading.

Tamako carried the sleeping Anzu on her back all the way back to Marugame Castle. Dried tears lined the sleeping Anzu's cheek.

Upon seeing Anzu, the adults' search party dispersed with a sigh of relief. The other girls started heading back to the dormitory as well.

Tamako continued carrying Anzu on her back.

"Anzu, what did you think would happen if a girl like you slept in the park all alone late at night? I'm gonna give you an earful when you wake up."

But Tamako was smiling even as she said that. She was indeed mad at Anzu, but it seemed she was even happier to know that Anzu was safe.

Anzu woke up en route to the dormitory.

"Huh...? Where am I...?"

"Marugame Castle. We're just about back at the dorm."

When Wakaba answered her, Anzu looked around dubiously, still half-asleep.

"Huh...? Oh, I must've fallen asleep reading..."

"Was that the book you were reading?"

Hinata gestured toward the paperback book Anzu was still holding onto.

Even in her sleep, Anzu wouldn't let go of the book. The cover looked quite darker than the romance novels Anzu usually read.

"Yes... Nevil Shute's 'On the Beach'... It's about a post-apocalyptic world where people try to keep living normal lives until the very end. Reading it made me feel sad... but I just couldn't stop reading..."

Perhaps still sleepy, Anzu said just that before closing her eyes once more.

"We'll... be okay... right...? Forever..."

It was hard to tell from Anzu's tone if she were sleeptalking or if she were serious.

"Of course we'll be okay, Anzu! Our world's not post-apocalyptic. We don't have to worry about waiting to the very end. Just leave it ta Tama ta make sure you and the whole world are safe!"

Anzu's breathing calmed down in response to Tamako's words.

In the end, Tamako carried Anzu all the way back to her room like that.

"... I don't think we shall discover anything that's good, or very hopeful. But even so, it's fun just finding out..."

Wakaba muttered as she gazed at the picture of Tamako carrying Anzu.

"Wakaba-chan, what was that?"

Yuuna asked dubiously.



"Ahh, that's a line from the protagonist of 'On the Beach'... I borrowed it from Anzu after that all happened."

That novel was the sad story of a post-apocalyptic world.

But until the end of the end, people continued their jobs as normal, raised children, did housework, and spent normal days with their family and loved ones--

If the world were not faced with impending collapse, this surely would have been an all too ordinary, happy story.

If only.

If only Wakaba and the other girls lived in a world not faced with impending collapse, they would surely be living ordinary, happy days.

"... Let's look at the next picture!"

And with Yuuna's suggestion, Hinata swiped her screen.

One by one, new pictures showed up.

A picture of everyone by a decorated Christmas tree, from before the Vertexes started appearing again.

"That reminds me... This is around when I started getting along with Gun-chan."

Even after the six of them started living together in Marugame Castle, Chikage still would not open her heard to anyone.

At school, she would play games with headphones on during breaks. During lunch break, she would disappear somewhere, apparently to eat alone. After school, she would immediately head back to her dorm room, speaking with nobody.

Tamako, Yuuna, and the others would try talking to her during break times, but they would get no reaction from Chikage as she was too busy concentrating on her games with her headphones on.

"What's her problem!? We're trying to talk to her! How gloomy can you be!?"

Even as Tamako vented her frustration, Chikage didn't so much as look up from her game screen.

And then one day, near the end of the year, Christmas decorations started popping up downtown.

"We gotta do something Christmas-y too! Together!"

Yuuna declared.

"Christmas...?"

Just then, Chikage paused her game and murmured.



It was a quiet little voice, but since she rarely responded to her classmates at all, everyone turned to Chikage.

Chikage awkwardly looked away and resumed her game, but Yuuna spoke up to her.

"Let's have a Christmas party, Gun-chan!"

"..."

"Okay?"

"... I don't know what Christmas parties are like... My family's... never done anything... for Christmas..."

Those words took Tamako and Anzu by surprise. As the Miko attached with the heroes, Hinata alone was informed of Chikage's past and strained household situation, and thus could see how that might be the case.

"Well, you see, for a Christmas party, you decorate a huuuge tree, eat cake and poultry, wear hats, and go all 'boom!' and stuff!"

"...? I know... what a Christmas tree is... but...? Poultry? ... like honetsuki dori? Boom... so you shoot guns? So... you wear hats while eating honetsuki dori and shooting each other with guns...?"

A scene played out in Chikage's mind with fedora-wearing mafiosos devouring honetsuki dori with one hand, pistol in the other, shooting at each other.

"No, no! You see, there are these things made with gunpowder where you pull the string and they make a super loud sound! And the hats are, well... they're like, triangle shaped like this!"

Yuuna awkwardly tried to describe party poppers and party hats. But Chikage didn't seem to follow.

"Anyway, let's have a Christmas party! Then you'll understand! Okay?"

Yuuna almost overbearingly decided to hold a Christmas party in the Marugame Castle classroom for Chikage to attend.

Since it was a Christmas party organized by young girls, it was not much. They could only prepare a small tree, decorate the classroom, and get a cake and some sweets they scrounged up.

But still, everyone enjoyed themselves quite a bit.

As they prepared for the party, Yuuna stayed by Chikage's side the entire time, and little by little, Chikage started talking with her.

"Takashima-san... I'm not good talking with people... I've always just played games..."

Chikage spoke while decorating the classroom.

"You like games?"

"Yeah... that's all I'm good at, anyway..."

Chikage spoke just a little bit happily.

"I see. Then I'll go buy a game you're playing too. Can we play together?"

"In that case... I'll give you a game... I recommend... with coop play. That way... we can play together..."

"Huh? I can't just take it from you!"

"It's okay... Today's Christmas, right...? I heard... that you give presents... on Christmas."

"Then I'll give you something as a present too, Gun-chan!"

Chikage smiled shyly.

"Okay... thanks. Oh, and... it's 'Koori'... not 'Gun'..."

"Huh, really!?"

"It's... okay, Takashima-san. If it's you... you can call me that."

"So I ended up still calling her Gun-chan after that."

Yuuna looked a just a little bit lonesome as she said that.

"It seemed like Chikage-san liked it when you called her that, Yuuna-san."

Hinata said with a smile as she gazed at the picture.

They looked through some more pictures.

A picture of everyone in the dining hall, right after the Vertexes began invading-- a commemorative photo after the Shikoku heroes' first battle.

"It's already been a year since then, huh..."

Wakaba murmured.

They flipped through more photos and found one of their new years spa trip. Everyone in the hot springs, everyone playing games late at night... irreplaceable moments.

A commemorative photo of before they left Shikoku for their investigation expedition. Tamako and Anzu were so excited the day before that they couldn't sleep. The results of the investigation itself were tragic, but up until right before they left, they were as excited as if they were going on a field trip.

Back then, there were six of them altogether.

But now--



"Hey, Wakaba-chan, Hina-chan. There were six of us, right...?"

Wakaba nodded at those words.

"Yeah... that's correct."

Five heroes and one miko.

"Gun-chan... was there by our side, right...?"

Five heroes. Not four.

"Wakaba-chan, Yuuna-san... Shall we go look for her? Where Chikage-san was buried, and how... So that we can visit her."

Wakaba and the others were told where Tamako and Anzu were buried after their funeral service. They would visit their graves every now and then.

But they were not told what happened to Chikage's body after she was taken to her home. It was as if someone were trying to completely sever Koori Chikage's existence from them.

"Yeah... Let's look for her! I didn't even get to say goodbye to Gun-cha."

Yuuna looked up and made that declaration.

After school, Wakaba, Yuuna, and Hinata went looking for Chikage's whereabouts together. The staff members at the school and hospital the heroes went to obstinately refused to tell them anything.

Perhaps they had been hushed by the Taisha.

Their search quickly reached a deadlock, but Hinata suddenly had an idea.

"I just remembered, Chikage-san's family was moved to Marugame to live with her. If we could find their house, we might be able to ask her family about her."

A Koori family moved to Marugame at the beginning of June-- they should be able to narrow it down with that information. Wakaba, Yuuna, and Hinata split up and began gathering information from residents.

But the person who told them where the house was said this:

--"Nobody lives there anymore."

Chikage's father left one night and never came back. Her mother was taken to some hospital for her Uranophobia. Hinata had heard that Chikage's father had some personality issues. After his daughter had been discharged as a hero, the Taisha had cut him off of support, which perhaps made him abandon everything and run away.



Wakaba, Yuuna, and Hinata tried going to that house, but just as they were told, it was completely empty.

Except for one room Wakaba found-- a room in complete disarray. Furniture, clothes, books, game consoles, a computer... everything was destroyed. The three girls were in shock at the sight. It was as if a tornado had torn through the room.

Judging by the items they found, it was probably Chikage's room.

A gruesome room seemingly reflective of her emotions at the time.

"Maybe... Chikage wrecked this room herself..."

That was the conclusion Wakaba had come to. After all, while everything else in the room had been destroyed, there was just one thing that remained neatly intact.

A piece of paper placed on top of the torn bed was the only thing left untouched in the wreckage.

It was a familiar sheet of paper.

Yuuna picked it up.

"... It's the diploma we all gave Gun-chan together..."

Back when all six of them were together.

"Chikage-san... kept it safe this entire time..."

Hinata spoke in a trembling voice.

Even after she had destroyed everything in her room, Chikage kept this one thing intact.

It was after Wakaba had proposed they do a mock battle in the school for recreation--

Anzu was the one to suggest making a diploma.

Since all six girls used the same classroom, they rarely remembered that they were in different school years. Anzu was perhaps the only one really aware of it, as she spoke in keigo with everyone aside from Tamako. As a result, Anzu was the first to remember that Chikage would've been in her third year of middle school and would thus graduate the next year.

"I call Tamacchi-sempai Tamacchi-sempai, but if you think about it, Chikage-san's the real sempai here!"

"Wha!? Are you calling Tama an impos-tama?"

"No, but... well, yeah, but..."

"Tama's a real sempai, okay!?"

"Tamacchi-sempai, you're really the same age as me!"

That exchange between Tamako and Anzu aside,

Anzu suggested that they should really make the most of the occasion and give Chikage something to commemorate her graduation.

Everyone agreed, and so they went to a local stationery shop to buy formal certificate paper. The five of them composed the content of the text, and Wakaba wrote it as she had the best handwriting.

The winner of the mock battle would hand the diploma to Chikage. If Chikage herself won, then everyone would hand it to her together. That was the plan.

A diploma made by her friends in Marugame Castle.

Definite proof that the girl named Koori Chikage had lived there.

"..."

Yuuna's shoulders shook in silence.

In the end, they had no more footprints to follow to find Chikage.

They were nothing but ordinary girls outside of their "Is a hero" and "Is a miko" status, so they were limited in what they could do.

But while they were unable to find Chikage, the girls made a solemn vow.

One day, the Taisha requested Wakaba once again address the citizens with another speech:

Now that Chikage had passed away, Wakaba and Yuuna were the only heroes capable of fighting. Thus, the citizens needed to be calmed and given peace of mind. Furthermore, they were to be told that Chikage's death was a result of her becoming unsuitable as a hero, and that Wakaba and Yuuna excelled in both ability and mental fortitude, so they would not be defeated by the Vertexes. Thus, Shikoku was safe.

Wakaba stood at Marugame Castle, facing the people once again.

The people came to hear the hero's words.

The media came to broadcast the hero's speech live.

Wakaba had completely memorized the speech the Taisha had prepared, along with the gestures and intonation she was to use. As with the previous speech, it was a carefully formulated speech created by analyzing famous speeches of the past. The speech wove a story with logical progression, decorated with eloquent rhetoric. The gestures and intonation were carefully chosen for psychological effect.

It was a speech whose first and foremost goal was to manipulate the audience's emotions.



Again, like the last time, Wakaba began the speech as instructed by the Taisha.

But she abandoned the script in the middle.

"Koori Chikage was a genuine hero!!

Wakaba cried out.

"It is true that she lost her mental stability! However! With her dying breaths, Chikage protected me! If it were not for Chikage's protection, I would be dead! If sacrificing your life to protect another does not make you a hero, then tell me, what will!? Even if the entire world denies her as a hero, Chikage is a hero to me-- to all her friends-- and we are not afraid to say it! Tamako, Anzu, and Chikage were all heroes... The five of us were all heroes who fought side by side!!"

The TV broadcast cut out midway, but Wakaba continued to cry out from her heart nonetheless.

"You were so cool, Wakaba-chan!"

"Indeed, I was moved too."

After Wakaba's speech ended, Yuuna and Hinata greeted her with a smile
.
Afterwards, Wakaba, Yuuna, and Hinata all formally urged the Taisha to treat Chikage as a hero.

The decision of how Chikage was to be treated was put temporarily on hold, along with her dishonorable discharge status.

And then in July--

An oracle was passed down foretelling an imminent Vertex invasion.

Countermeasures for the large Vertex currently forming outside the barrier have yet to be found.

Only two heroes remain.

(Chapter 17 END)

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME EIGHTEEN!!
18

NOVEL



乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい　イラスト：BUNBUN　監修：Project 2H

ウルトラ怪獣擬人化計画

設定・原案・シリーズ構成：海法紀光
執筆：谷崎央佳（ミームミーム）
イラスト：ハル犬
原作・監修：円谷プロダクション

ガーリッシュ ナンバー

著：渡 航
キャラクター原案・カラーイラスト：QP:flapper
モノクロイラスト：堂本裕貴



The Shinju-sama is apparently a conglomeration of land gods.

But some gods who were [redacted]ed from [redacted]

are mixed alongside them as well.

It's quite reassuring to think about.

Hero Record Aug 2019 AD

Takashima Yuuna's Record



第十八話

―根絶（前編）―

vol.18

Planning and configuration by Takahiro
Writing by Akashiro Aoi
illustration by Bunbun
Vertex Design by D.K&JWWORKS
Supervision by Project 2H

企画原案・シリーズ構成／
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆／朱白あおい
イラスト／ BUNBUN
バーテックスデザイン／ D.K&JWWORKS
監修／ Project 2H

©2017 Project 2H

乃木若葉は勇者である



"Haah, whew... Hmmm, I think I've got the hang of it again!"

"Yeah, your stamina's back to how it was before you were in the hospital."

Yuuna and Wakaba finished running laps around the Marugame Castle grounds and took a breather at the inner citadel. Yuuna's stamina had dropped due to her long stay in the hospital, but she fully regained it in about a month's time.

"Here, have some of Hinata's special sports drink. You need to stay hydrated."

"Okay!"

Yuuna took the bottle from Wakaba and drank from it.

It was the dead of the summer. Wakaba and Yuuna had only run a little bit, but they were both drenched in sweat. Their gym uniforms clung to their skin. A cacophony of cicadas shook the surrounding trees.

After Yuuna finished drinking, Wakaba retrieved the bottle and put her lips to it. A sweet, yet slightly sour taste spread through her mouth.

"Oh right, Wakaba-chan, did you hear the news?"

"Hmm? What news?"

"The barrier fortification thing."

"Oh... that Taisha plan, huh?"

At the end of July, an oracle was received foretelling an imminent Vertex invasion.

But the Taisha had still not yet found any way to counter the colossal Vertex still fusing outside the barrier. The oversized monster was slowly, yet steadily growing as if to sneer at humanity from the shadows.

Furthermore, additional giant Vertexes were confirmed outside the barrier as well. Several at the same scale as the Scorpion-type had appeared.

For over a month, the Vertexes had held back on invading Shikoku, likely biding their time to grow the giant Vertexes outside the barrier. According to the Shinju's oracle, the enemy would soon complete its battle preparations and go on an all-out invasion of Shikoku.

The Taisha had still not found a countermeasure for those giant Vertexes. Yuuna's use of Shuten-Doji was a near-suicidal double-edged sword, and thus could hardly be considered an effective strategy at all.

But according to the Taisha, as long as humanity could overcome this next attack, they would be able to prepare two countermeasures to keep the enemy invasion in check.

The first of such countermeasures was fortification of the barrier, a measure that had been in the planning stages for some time.

After finishing the drink, Wakaba gazed at the sea from the stone castle wall. The sea, the summery sky, and the Shinju's barrier spread out in the distance.

Though it wasn't visible from inside the barrier, the colossal Vertex was still there. A visual blockade applied to the barrier had erased its image, but not its presence.

"Apparently they're strengthening the barrier's actual defense this time, and not just the visual blockade..."

"They've going at it with a whole buncha rituals and stuff to prepare, too."

"Yeah. Looks like it'll take a few months, but... once it's done, the Vertexes won't be able to invade so easily anymore."

"Yeah. But... what do you think the 'other' countermeasure could be?"

Yuuna tilted her head.

Neither Wakaba, nor Yuuna, nor even Hinata had been told what exactly the Taisha's "other" countermeasure was. That uncertainty made Wakaba a little uneasy. Why would the Taisha keep the details of a "countermeasure" so secret--?

"... Anyway, if we win the next battle, we can enact all the countermeasures we want! That way the Vertexes won't be able to come in anymore. Peace at last!"

Yuuna spoke with a bright voice.

That proactive tone helped Wakaba shake off her anxiety.

"You're right."

Gigantic white columns of clouds formed in the faraway sky.

If the Taisha's words were to be believed, the next battle would be the last. A battle full of despair, with nothing to rely on but the small glimmer of hope on the other side.

Yuuna and Wakaba spent their time preparing. They continued their martial arts and basic stamina training, making sure to take sufficient breaks and maintaining proper nutrition.

In preparation for the next battle, Wakaba formally requested the Taisha iron out the hero system's forced cancellation behavior.

In Chikage's final moments... if her hero system did not cancel itself, she may have had a path to survival. No matter what situation the heroes found themselves in, they would support each other and try to find a way to make it through with their own strength. Getting robbed of their powers would do nothing to help their chances.



"The will of the Shinju-sama aside, I would prefer that forced cancellation not occur. I implore you to put your trust in us" -- Her request was accepted and the hero system was updated.

In addition to the training, breaks, and hero system improvement, there was one other preparation Wakaba needed to make.

Preparation to imbue her body with a powerful fairy-- a heretofore forbidden fairy on the same level as Yuuna's Shuten-Doji.

After her training with Yuuna, Wakaba returned to her room to be greeted by none other than Hinata.

"Now then, let's begin today's study time!"

Various books were piled on top of her desk: old sun-faded books; watoji, books stab-bound in the traditional Japanese way; and orihon, folding accordion books... All of the literature pertained to legendary myths and miracles.

Hinata had gathered them all.

"Ugh... Another big haul today, huh. Is this really all necessary?"

"The more you familiarize yourself with its literature, the stronger your grasp on the fairy's image becomes... Which makes it easier for you to imbue yourself with its power. That's what the Taisha members have told you, right?"

"Well, yeah, but..."

For the next battle, Wakaba was to imbue her body with a fairy rivaling Shuten-Doji. And for such a task, there was no such thing as too much preparation.

Wakaba wasn't at all adverse to reading, but she had already finished reading all the major literary works. All the books Hinata had been bringing in lately were fragile antiques. The actual content was antiquated as well, with nigh-illegible cursive handwriting and archaic grammar. Wakaba could hardly "decipher" the text, much less "read" it. Hinata was helping to "decipher" it, but--

"I trained with Yuuna today, so I'm tired... I really don't want to read books anymore..."

"Oh my. So practice time with Yuuna-san's more important than study time with me, Wakaba-chan?"

"If you cleaned my ears and let me lie on your lap, that might motivate me..."

"What am I ever going to do with you... Okay, sure"

"Mmm!"

Hinata laid Wakaba on her lap and started cleaning Wakaba's ears.

"Haahooh... so relaxing..."

"Wakaba-chan, you're making such an unsightly face right now."

"Mmm... but... there's nobody here... but you and me, Hinata... so who cares~..."

The door swung open.

"Wakaba-chan, Hina-chan, about tomorrow--"

It was Yuuna. She took one look at Wakaba and Hinata and froze for just a second before beginning to gently close the door.

"Sorry. I'll come back later."

"Wait, Yuuna! It's okay! Now's fine!"

Wakaba stopped Yuuna from leaving and brought her inside the room.

"Uugh, I'm so sorry... I let my guard down and let you see an unsightly side of me... I'm a disgrace as a warrior..."

"D-don't worry about it! I never imagined seeing you like that, so I was just a teensy bit surprised, that's all. I'm the one who should apologize for barging in like that."

Yuuna comforted the depressed Wakaba.

Hinata smiled at the two of them with a chuckle here and an "oh my" there.

"Personally, I think you're cute with a lax smile like that, Wakaba-chan."

"H-Hinata!!"

Hinata ignored Wakaba's death glare to ask Yuuna a question.

"By the way, did you need something?"

"Oh yeah! Guys, wanna go out tomorrow?"

"Hmm? Well, tomorrow's a break from training, so I don't see why not."

"Count me in as well."

It was summer break, so there were no classes, leaving their daily schedules free outside of training and preparing for the next battle.

"Okay, that settles it then!"

And thus, at Yuuna's suggestion, the three of them planned to go out the next day.

"So it's a three-way date, then," Hinata mused.



The next day, the girls decided to meet in front of Marugame Castle's Oteichinomon Gate. Hinata reached the rendezvous point first and waited for Wakaba and Yuuna.

"That's strange. Wakaba-chan's usually at least ten minutes early for meetups..."

Just as that thought crossed Hinata's mind, Wakaba appeared.

"Sorry for the wait!"

"No, it's okay, you're still early, so... Wait, what are you wearing?"

Wakaba wore a baseball cap and jeans, accessorized with oversized sunglasses covering her eyes, a large surgical mask enveloping her mouth, and her sword in hand.

"It's a disguise. It's too conspicuous for a hero to be walking around town in the open. So I did my best to pick out clothes that would blend in and hide the fact that it's me. But I just couldn't part with my sword. Might need it in case of emergency."

"... Wakaba-chan..."

Hinata glanced at Wakaba with squinted eyes as Yuuna showed up.

"You two sure got here early!"

"Ah, Yuuna-san... wait, what is that?"

Yuuna was wearing a mask. Not a surgical mask, but a tokusatsu TV show hero mask like the ones you can buy at festivals.

"It's a disguise! You know, so that the citizens can't tell we're the heroes!"

Hinata placed her hands on Wakaba's and Yuuna's shoulders.

"Guys... you're not allowed to dress like that on a 'date'."

In the end, Hinata ended up re-coordinating Wakaba and Yuuna's wardrobe choices before they headed out. However, Wakaba would not let go of her sword, swearing "It's for emergencies! Emergencies! Just in case!" so Hinata gave up on that front.

Once they left the Marugame Castle grounds, they tried walking in busy areas. Though passersby took notice of the girls, they didn't cause a commotion.

"Wakaba-chan, Yuuna-chan, you two might be famous, but it's not like you're doing anything wrong, so just keep your chins up."

"Ahahah, you're right."

"Perhaps I've gotten a bit too tense."

Yuuna and Wakaba spoke sheepishly.

"By the way, Yuuna, is there anywhere in particular you'd like to go?"

"Nope, not exactly... I just kinda wanted to walk in town with you two. Am I bothering you?"

Hinata and Wakaba smiled.

"Not at all. I think it's a great idea. We should relax every now and then."

"Yeah. Even if we don't have anywhere to go in particular, we're friends, so we can have fun wherever we go."

From Marugame Castle, the girls somewhat aimlessly headed toward Marugame Station.

From Oteichinomon Gate, they went through the main street, past the city office, and into the shopping district.

The shopping district was busy and bustling. Four years ago, Shikoku's population spiked due to the influx of refugees from Honshu and Kyushu. As a result, the areas around the shopping district and the station were always crowded.

Throughout the shopping district, they saw posters for the "Marugame Basara Matsuri" held at the end of August.

"It's already festival time, huh."

"Yes. Looks like it'll be extravagant again this year."

The Marugame Basara Matsuri was the biggest festival held inside the city, rivaling the Marugame Castle Matsuri held in May. There's a fireworks display held during the Basara Matsuri, attracting many visitors from out of town.

"But... what exactly does the "Basara" part mean? Isn't that a game?"

Yuuna quizzically asked as she looked at the poster.

"Apparently it originates from the Kyogoku clan, the lords of Marugame in the Edo period. The ancestor of the Kyogoku clan, Sasaki Doyo, was also known as 'Basara Daimyo'. Basara meaning 'showy' or 'elegant'."

"Wow, Wakaba-chan, you sure know your stuff~!"

"Well, it's because I've lived here for a long time. It's local history."

Wakaba spoke plainly, without much pride.

'Actually,' Hinata thought to herself, 'most people our age aren't that familiar with local history.'



As they passed through a general store in the shopping district, some hand fans for sale caught Yuuna's eye.

"Ah, handmade hand fans!"

Marugame City was the number one producer of hand fans in Japan, making expertly crafted handmade hand fans something of a brand there. The three girls bought hand fans and started walking in the shopping district again.

"Mmm... walking around like this with hand fans out, it feels like something's missing..."

Hinata furrowed her eyebrows in thought.

Wakaba had a bad feeling about this.

"Oh, right! Hand fans in the summer go hand in hand with yukata. Wakaba-chan, Yuuna-san, let's go buy yukata and wear them around!"

"N-no, it's weird to wear a yukata when there isn't even a festival going on, isn't it?"

"Y-yeah, what she said... maybe next time."

Wakaba and Yuuna responded, overwhelmed by Hinata's enthusiasm.

"That's too bad... Then when the festival comes, I'll pick the best yukata for both of you. I can't wait." Hinata rambled expectantly.

Afterwards, they walked around the shopping district and ate udon.

They passed through Marugame Station and headed towards the ocean. The path from the station to the was part of a street called Marugame-Kaido which connects Marugame Port to Kagawa's most famous shrine, Konpira-gu. Edo period pilgrims would use Marugame-Kaido to visit Konpira-gu.

"Konpira-gu, huh... Now that I think about it, I visited a shrine a lot as a kid."

"You visited regularly? Not too many do."

"Yeah. It wasn't as big as something like Kompira-gu, though."

Yuuna spoke as they walked.

"Now that I think about it, Yuuna-san, we haven't heard much about you from before you came to Marugame."

"True. You always prioritize others above yourself, Yuuna. You're such a good listener that you'd rather listen to others than talk about yourself. That's a rare trait."

"You're so considerate, Yuuna-san. It's a wonderful quality. That's probably why everyone loves you."

Yuuna swallowed her words halfway and spoke no more.

The sun had already started to set by the time they had reached the beach. The sky was dyed a madder red and the ferries anchored to the port looked somehow sad.

Yuuna looked towards the sun setting over the ocean as she began to speak.

"The truth is, that part of me is nothing praiseworthy at all."

Wakaba and Hinata looked at Yuuna with puzzled looks.

"People tell me I'm considerate all the time, but... there's nothing praiseworthy about it. I just... hate... getting into arguments or raising tensions between people... That's why I'm always listening... and never talk about myself. But--"

The usually bright girl, the considerate peacemaker and moodmaker among the heroes-- Takashima Yuuna turned toward Wakaba and Hinata with her back facing the setting sun. Her facial expression looked just a little bit lonely.

"I know it's too late now... but I feel kinda sad... that I never talked about myself with Tama-chan, An-chan, or Gun-chan... I really should have..."

"Yuuna..."

"So Wakaba-chan, Hina-chan... I want you to know more. About me."

Wakaba and Hinata gently gazed at Yuuna and nodded.

"Yeah, please tell us more about you. Everything you want to tell us."

"I want to know more about you too, Yuuna-san."

"... Thanks."

Yuuna smiled and spoke somewhat nervously, as if introducing herself for the first time.

"I, Takashima Yuuna, am a hero. I'm from Nara. My birthday is January 11. Blood type A. My hobby is... martial arts, I guess? Oh, and I like eating yummy food too. Before I became a hero... when I was a kid, I loved playing outside. I'd also go to shrine near home and help clean as a volunteer, or just play inside the grounds. You see, shrine grounds are perfect for playing hide and seek. There are sooo many places to hide. But the shinto priests would get mad at me when I'd go into off-limit areas."

Yuuna endlessly reminisced about herself while Wakaba and Hinata quietly listened.

"So I was really close to the shrine and the shinto priests... and maybe that's why I adapted to the whole Taisha thing more naturally than everyone else."

"So, Yuuna-san, you spent your time at the shrine as a kid and you were more rambunctious, huh."

"Rambunctious...? Hmm, maybe a bit."



Yuuna blushed just a little.

As she watched Yuuna, Hinata something the Taisha priests told her during her miko training-- Invisible things like purity, corruption, and divine might and mystery would accumulate within the human body through contact. According to what is known in cultural anthropology as "contagious magic", there is a law which states that once two things come in contact with each other, they continue to influence each other even after they have been separated. That law is derived from how those invisible things accumulate in the human body. Yuuna's continued childhood contact with the shrine environment perhaps had some influence on her power as a hero.

"But I wasn't as much of an outdoorsman as Tama-chan, or as smart as An-chan, or anything. I was really plain. So I was surprised when I became a hero. 'Why me?' I thought. I was afraid of fighting.

But... I was even more afraid of losing my friends and family. You see... the truth is, I'm fighting because I'm afraid... I'm a coward."

Perhaps that was why she admired the word 'hero'-- Yuuna smiled wryly.

Afterwards, Yuuna spoke a lot about herself. Things that happened to her in kindergarten and elementary school, her old friends, and her family...

After a long while talking, Yuuna sighed a breath of relief.

"I think this might have been the most I've talked in my life."

Wakaba and Hinata smiled.

"I'm glad you told us so much about yourself, Yuuna."

"Yes. I feel like I know you a lot better now, Yuuna-san. ... So in return, let me tell you more about Wakaba-chan."

"Huh? More about me? Not yourself?"

Hinata continued unperturbed,

"Yes. You see, ever since Wakaba-chan was little, she's been a diligent hard-worker. A little TOO diligent. So much so that it frightened those around her, see. But she's cute when she works herself up about that fact."

"Wha- s-stop that, Hinata! Don't tell her about that!"

"Yuuna-san told us about herself, so now we need to tell her about you, Wakaba-chan."

"Again, why me and not you!?"

"Right, right, so, Wakaba-chan was incredibly popular with underclassman girls, you see. She even had a fan club..."



"What!? Not even I knew about that!"

"... Heheh, ahahah."

Yuuna smiled awkwardly as she watched Wakaba quarrel with Hinata.

Even as they left the beach and walked back to Marugame Castle, the girls talked about many things and laughed together. They spoke about nothing important in particular, but they enjoyed themselves nonetheless.

"Yuuna. From now on, feel free to talk about anything that's on your mind. Even if it might make me mad. Even if it'll get us arguing. Because at the end of the day, a friend is still a friend. Some things will never change. That's what I believe."

"Yes, I agree. ... It's nice and refreshing to be open like this."

"Yeah. Thanks, Wakaba-chan, Hina-chan."

Three long shadows walked side by side under the setting sun.

They would never lose another friend again-- that was their wish.

And before long--
the Vertexes invaded Shikoku.

Amidst the forestized land of Shikoku stood just two heroes capable of fighting.

Wakaba and Yuuna stood upon the castle walls of Marugame Castle's inner citadel, gazing at the swarm of Vertexes coming in from beyond the barrier.

Several giant Vertexes stood out among the sea of countless common Vertexes.

"Looks like... six giant Vertexes in total, huh."

"That huge one we saw near the Seto Ohashi Bridge isn't around, huh."

"Indeed. Maybe it isn't complete yet...?"

The six giant Vertexes invading Shikoku were each around the same size as the scorpion-type Vertex they previously encountered.

"But that's convenient in its own way. Let's start off by defeating these six to chip down their forces.

That way we'll be able to deal with that colossal Vertex if and when it appears."

"Yeah! So for now, we just gotta take down three of these guys each. Welp, let's get to it."

This would be the final battle. Wakaba and Yuuna had nothing to hold back.

The invading Vertexes immediately began corroding the Jukai.

The two girls shut their eyes and concentrated.

They traced the hero power dwelling within them back to its source, accessing the Shinju's conceptual record. From there, they extracted the power of the fairies to imbue their bodies with.

"Come forth-- Shuten-Doji!"

"Descend-- Daitengu!"

Yuuna imbued herself with the avatar of unrivaled power, the demon king, "Shuten-Doji", the only force to have defeated a giant Vertex in battle thus far. Yuuna's hero outfit transformed. Her personal weapon, her tekko gloves, grew huge. Her strengthened tekko could smash through perhaps any opposing force.

Wakaba on the other hand imbued herself with the great demon rivaling the gods, the Maen king, "Daitengu", who in legend burned the heavenly world to ash in one night. Wakaba's hero outfit transformed. Giant jet-black wings sprouted from her back.

Shuten-Doji, Daitengu-- imbued with the superhuman power of these two beings, the two girls opened their eyes to turn them towards the predators who sought destruction of the human world. The advance squadron of common Vertexes was the first to reach Marugame Castle. But they were no challenge to the heroes who had been fighting such common enemies for over a year.

With each swing of Yuuna's fist and each slash of Wakaba's sword, the common Vertexes fell one after the other. More accurately, Yuuna's fists shattered dozens of common enemies with each strike. Even the projectile firing enemies were no difficulty: Wakaba cut them down instantaneously using the overwhelming mobility her new wings afforded her.

Power and speed. The two complimented each other's shortcomings as the pair of heroes efficiently whittled the enemy away.

Suddenly, one of the six approaching giant Vertexes burrowed underground.

"!? It's moving underground...!?"

Wakaba cut down enemies with her sword in one hand as she checked the giant Vertex's movements on her smartphone map. The burrowing enemy was headed for--

"The Shinju, huh?"

"Wakaba-chan, I'll take care of the one underground!"

Yuuna jumped off the inner citadel castle walls.

"Yeah, go for it. I'll stop these enemies in their tracks!"



After seeing Yuuna off, Wakaba was attacked by other giant Vertexes. A long-bodied Vertex divided into countless joints, and a Vertex with demonic bull-like horns. The two monsters charged at the comparatively tiny Wakaba. It was an overly simple attack, but the sheer difference in scale meant a corresponding difference in power and stamina. A single direct hit would pulverize the girl's body beyond recognition--

Or it would if it weren't for the fact that Wakaba's current mobility made evading such an attack a non-issue. After evading the attack in one second, Wakaba glared at the predators with her sword in hand.

"This is the end for you, you monsters."

After seeing Wakaba evade the giant Vertexes' attack, Yuuna breathed a sigh of relief.

(Wakaba-chan will be fine-- I know it.)

With that conviction in mind, Yuuna chased after the large underground Vertex. It was rapidly approaching the Shinju moment by moment, but it wouldn't surface at all.

"Uugh, I can't get it unless it comes out...! At this rate, the Shinju's done for..."

If a Vertex were to destroy the Shinju, Shikoku too would be destroyed.

"In that case... it's time for the last resort!!"

Yuuna pounded the surface of the ground where the Vertex was moving. Her fist shook the earth, leaving a crater, but the enemy still would not surface.

"Rohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

With intense speed and power, Yuuna continued pounding the ground. The earth rumbled continuously. The dirt warped and caved. And eventually, part of the hidden Vertex surfaced.

Yuuna's fists finally landed direct hits on the Vertex, smashing into it. But the Vertex still tried to continue on its way.

"Why you little!!"

Yuuna grabbed the fin-like portion of the giant Vertex and forcefully pulled it out of the ground.

Now that the giant Vertex was fully exposed, Yuuna readied her finishing blow--

But couldn't land it.

Before Yuuna could swing her fist, a giant white band knocked her away.

"Waugh!"

Yuuna's body slammed into the ground. The giant band was part of another giant Vertex... a deformed Vertex with a swollen abdomen. Yuuna was too preoccupied with the underground Vertex to notice the other enemy approaching.

The deformed Vertex fired egg-shaped bomb-like objects out of its swollen abdomen. Yuuna was too disoriented from the band attack to evade and took a direct hit. Yuuna's body flew through the air like leaves in autumn.

"Agh... ugh..."

Beaten and battered, Yuuna fell prostrate on one fo the Jukai's giant vines.

(Huh... my... body... won't... move...)

Her vision grew dark.

In her narrowing field of view, she saw three giant Vertexes heading through the air towards the Shinju. The burrowing Vertex she failed to defeat, the deformed Vertex with the swollen abdomen, and a Vertex surrounded by countless rod-like objects. At this rate, they would reach the Shinju and destroy Shikoku.

Yuuna's entire body was enveloped in crippling agony as a result of taking a direct hit from a Vertex attack as well as the kickback from using the superhuman power of Shuten-Doji.

(I've had... enough...)

Suddenly, everything seemed ridiculous to her. She felt intense resentment and indignation.

Why must she continue to fight while in such agony?

She resented the adults who tried to make her fight. She resented the Vertexes. She detested the very world itself for being broken.

The world was already ending. Was there even any point in protecting to the point of an agonizing death?

(I'm such an idiot... Fighting through such pain, such agony... Gun-chan, Tama-chan, An-chan... I don't even know what I'm fighting for anymore... being a hero is nothing but pain... and suffering... Why...)

Her heart filled with resentment at the incomprehensible, Yuuna lost consciousness.

--What am I fighting for?

"Because I'm a hero of course!! That's enough reason for me!"

Yuuna raised her voice, mustered all the strength in her body, and stood up.

She had only lost consciousness for a fleeting moment.



"I just had... a really bad thought again..."

That was the kickback from using such an overwhelmingly powerful fairy like Shuten-Doji. For just a moment, her mind was taken over by dark emotions. Ever since she first started using Shuten-Doji, such negative emotions would linger on.

"Just look at Wakaba-chan... she's trying her hardest..."

She could see Wakaba fighting in the distance, surrounded by Stardust and giant Vertexes. Three of the giant Vertexes were heading for the Shinju. Wakaba was fighting the remaining three. She was in no position to help Yuuna, nor to protect the Shinju.

Only Yuuna could protect the Shinju now.

"Ugh, uuugh...."

Her body was heavy.

Her eyes hazy.

Her head groggy.

But she was still alive. She could still move.

Shuten-Doji's power was still imbued within Yuuna's body.

In that case, she just had to grit her teeth and keep getting up, no matter how many times she fell.

"I...!"

Yuuna shouted.

"I... Takashima Yuuna, love everyone----!"

Her parents, who gave birth to her and raised her.

Her old friends, who played with her in kindergarten and elementary school.

The shinto priests, whom she met at the shrine in her childhood.

The citizens of Shikoku.

The staff at udon restaurants.

The fishermen of the Seto Inland Sea.

The farmers.

The workers in the shopping district.

Shiratori Utano and Fujimori Mito of Suwa.

And finally-- Nogi Wakaba, Uesato Hinata, Koori Chikage, Doi Tamako, and Iyojima Anzu.

She had lived only fourteen years of her life, but she had met many people. Even i a ruined world on the brink of despair, so many people had lived life to the fullest. Even if every single individual wasn't a bastion of virtue, everyone at least tried their hardest.

The strong. The weak. The gentle. The afraid. The brave. The bright. The dark. The intelligent. The athletic. The honest. The stubborn. The hotblooded. The coolheaded.

Yuuna acknowledged the efforts of all who tried to live in this era-- and she loved them all.

"So I'll protect this world... to the very endddddd!"

Yuuna kicked off the ground and leapt toward the three giant Vertexes heading towards the Shinju.

They were already near it.

Yuuna prioritized the one she had failed to defeat the first time. The enemy detected Yuuna's approach and tried to burrow again, but Yuuna's attack was too fast. She concentrated all her remaining strength into her fist and struck.

"Rohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

With one blow, she smashed into the giant Vertex's body.

And with her remaining momentum, Yuuna closed her distance to the other two.

She approached the deformed Vertex with the swollen abdomen and tried to smash her fist into it, but the third Vertex intercepted it by generating a reflective plate from its floating rod. The plate was hard enough to stop Yuuna's fist which had smashed through the other giant Vertexes.

But Yuuna didn't give up.

"You monsters stole so much from us! That ends today!!"

She kept punching the reflective plate.

The hero Takashima Yuuna's tekko were imbued with a spiritual power named "Amano Sakate [heaven's reversed hand]". A curse set forth by a land god prince upon his murder by a god of heaven.

The embodiment of his rage. His hatred, resentment, and chagrin for heaven and his desire to destroy.

The land god curse imbued in Yuuna's tekko corroded heaven-associated beings, leading to their collapse.

On the day the Vertexes first invaded, Yuuna was evacuating when she found those tekko in that familiar shrine. She has been fighting with those weapons imbued with divine power ever since.



The reflective plate blocking Yuuna's fist cracked and shattered. But it didn't end with just that plate. More reflective plates came to take its place to block Yuuna's attacks.

"No matter how many times it takes--"

Yuuna kept pounding with her fists. Though they were protected by the tekko, the kickback from Shuten-Doji's power was crumbling her hands. Blood spurted into the air from underneath the tekko.

But Yuuna didn't stop attacking.

Eventually she shattered all the reflective plates and her fists reached the giant Vertex's main body.

"We'll get up and try again! That's what makes us humaaaan!!"

Yuuna pulverized the giant Vertex's main body in one attack.

In the unexpected delay the reflective plate Vertex caused, the remaining giant Vertex had reached the Shinju. The enemy launched an egg-shaped bomb from its swollen abdomen, but a transparent protective wall formed around the Shinju, negating the attack. Realizing that long-distance attacks were ineffective, the giant Vertex approached closer.

"Heroooo Puuuuuuuunch!!"

Yuuna chased after the giant Vertex and drove her fist into it. Due to her overexertion throughout the battle, Yuuna's arms were broken and blackened from internal bleeding, her hands horrific lumps of blood and flesh. Normally it'd be impossible to even form fists in that state. It was nothing short of a miracle that Yuuna could keep fighting.

Yuuna's fist smashed the giant Vertex's abdomen with a single punch.

The enemy swung its white band and flung Yuuna away. Yuuna slammed against a Jukai vine and spat out large volumes of dark red blood. She had ruptured several internal organs. But without stopping for a moment, Yuuna lunged once more at the giant Vertex.

"I am!! The hero! Takashima Yuunaaaaaa!!"

Yuuna's fist pierced the giant Vertex's white band and smashed into its main body. The giant Vertex let out an eldritch scream and disintegrated.

Three down. She had defeated all of the giant Vertexes approaching the Shinju.

After using up the last of her strength, Yuuna fell to the ground.

By the Shinju's roots.

Neither the common Vertexes, nor any of the other three giant Vertexes approached the Shinju. Not a single one. Perhaps Wakaba had defeated them all.

Way to go, Wakaba-chan-- Yuuna silently praised the friend she trusted more than anyone else.



Yuuna could neither get up, nor even move a single finger.

Her vision went dark.

If she were to close her eyes now, they would probably never open again.

Just then, she felt a warmth envelop her body. It was a strange sensation, as if something were melting into her.

(Shinju... sama...? Am I... going inside... the Shinju-sama...?)

But strangely enough, she felt no fear.

(Wakaba-chan, Hina-chan... We didn't want to lose another friend... But I'm sorry... it doesn't look like I can keep up that promise...)

But she was glad.

Glad that she could protect everyone.

Yuuna smiled in relief as she let her consciousness slip one last time.

(Chapter 18 END)

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME NINETEEN!!
19

NOVEL

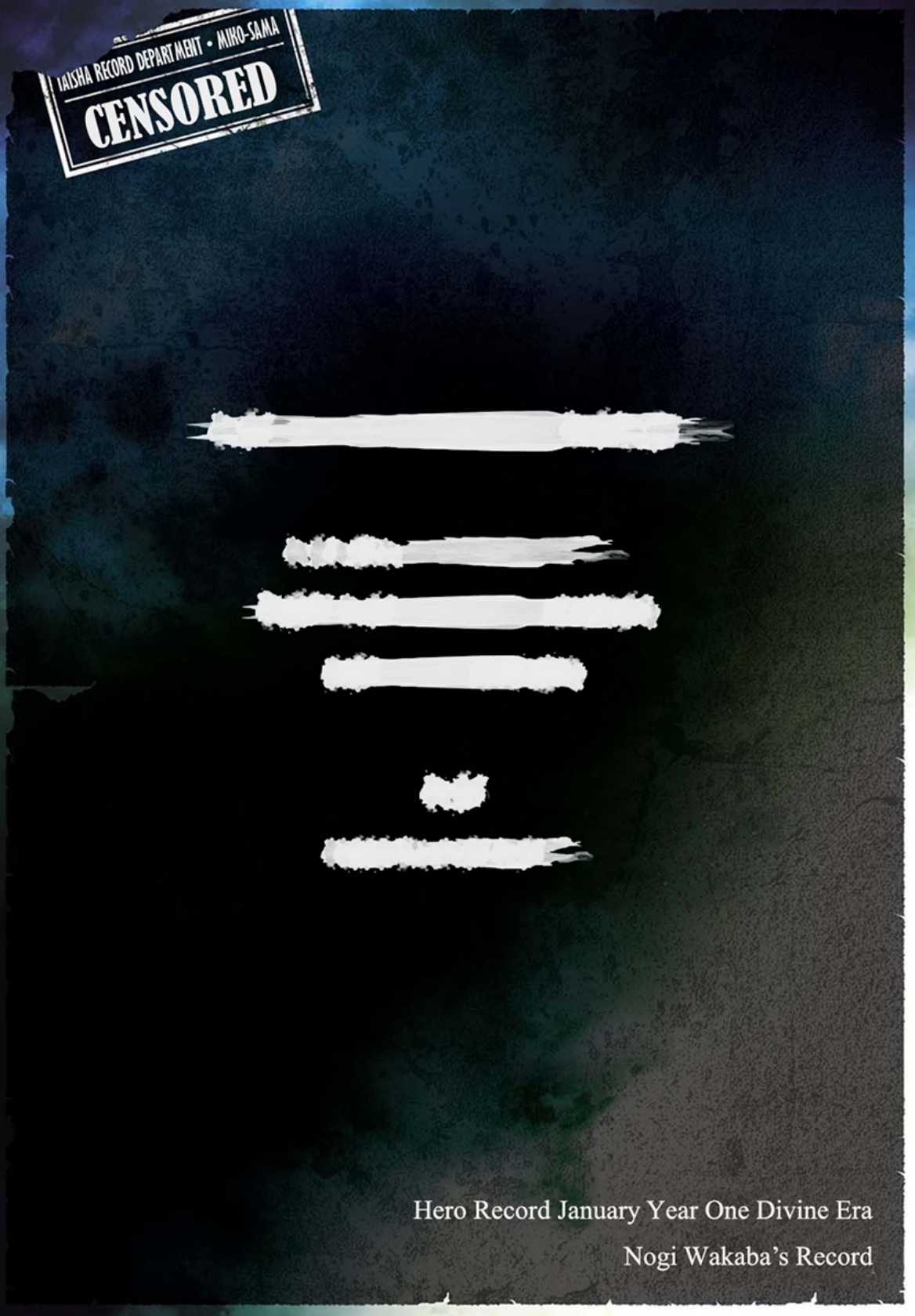


乃木若葉は勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成：
タカヒロ（みなとそふと）
執筆：朱白あおい
イラスト：BUNBUN
監修：Project 2H

ウルトラ怪獣擬人化計画

設定・原案・シリーズ構成：
海法紀光
執筆：谷崎央佳（ミームミーム）
イラスト：朱ハル犬
原作・監修：円谷プロダクション



Hero Record January Year One Divine Era

Nogi Wakaba's Record



-"Haaaaaahhh!!"

Imbued with the power of Daitengu, Wakaba ferociously continued the fight. Surrounding her were several Vertexes as well as three large Vertexes-- One whose body was segmented into countless joints, one with four horns, and one accompanied by two gigantic bubbles.

Now that Wakaba had used a trump card among trump cards, the common Vertexes were no longer a threat. The large Vertexes were a different story, however.

In addition to the three large Vertexes attacking Wakaba, another three had headed toward the Shinju. She had no choice but to leave those three up to Yuuna. As longtime comrades in arms, Wakaba trusted her.

-"Gh, ghack...!"

Wakaba's face twisted in pain as she spat out blood. Her wings allowed her to travel through the air at high speeds, but the way she fought using that ability had taken a significant toll on her body. The tremendous gravitational forces exerted on her body from high-speed flight was damaging her internal organs and her brain. She was whittling away at her body little by little simply continuing the fight.

Nevertheless, she continued to fight without a moment's rest. A battle against Vertexes was a battle against time as well. The longer the Vertexes remained within the barrier, the longer the Jukai corroded, causing damage to Shikoku as well.

In the blink of an eye, Wakaba slashed the segmented Vertex five times. But the six sliced segments simply regrew into six full-sized bodies which attacked Wakaba from all angles simultaneously.

Wakaba dodged the attacks with aerial maneuvers while observing the enemy. Since they had fought an evolved Vertex with a similar property, she was able to calmly assess the situation. Upon closer inspection, one of the six divided bodies was moving differently from the others. And whenever Wakaba attacked the outlier, the other five would defend it. The outlier was probably the control center of the group.

-"... This is it!!"

Wakaba sliced it in half. Without the control center, the other five bodies apparently lost their regeneration ability; when Wakaba sliced each one apart, they vanished instead of dividing into new entities.

But right as she was about to slay the last one, she found herself caught in a giant bubble.

-"...!?"

The two-bubbled Vertex had attacked her. Wakaba tried to move her wings to escape the bubble, but the four-horned Vertex thrust its horn into the water. The next moment, the horn began rapidly vibrating.

-"...Ghhbbh!?"

The horn's vibration caused the water to churn rapidly, rendering Wakaba's attempts to escape with her wings futile. She was cut off from air, her body's oxygen levels depleting. Her thoughts grew hazy from her brain's oxygen deprivation.

(Khh...!!)

From within the bubble, Wakaba could see yet another new large Vertex that had crossed over from the wall-- one with a giant arrow sticking out of a giant mouth. In the back of Wakaba's mind, she recalled the sight of devastated cityscapes and people slaughtered by monsters. She recalled the cruel deaths of Tamako, Anzu, and Chikage. The rage and hatred within made her sick to the stomach.

-"Aaaaaahhhhhhhhh!!"

--I'll kill you all.

I'll massacre every last one of you damn monsters. I'll give you your just reward. Doesn't matter what tricks you pull. I will find you. And I will kill you.

But no matter how much rage boiled within Wakaba, it still did not help her escape from the bubble.

Eventually she reached her limits, and her consciousness began to fade...

In the end, she recalled was the sight of the girl who had been with her since childhood-- Uesato Hinata. And then Yuuna, Tamako, Anzu, and Chikage. She recalled the days they had all spent together.

(I...)

In the past, Wakaba had fought solely for the sake of avenging those killed by the Vertexes. But thanks to Hinata and her other friends, she learned to instead fight for the sake of protecting those who lived. Wakaba was fighting not for revenge, but to protect people. To protect Hinata, and Yuuna, and all people of Shikoku.

(Don't let the fairy's influence take you hostage...!)

By setting aside her rage and focusing on her desire to protect, Wakaba regained her composure.

(I... will protect Shikoku from these monsters... and return to a life surrounded by friends...!)

Once this battle's over, let's go hang out with Yuuna and Hinata again. That time we spent the other day was fun, but it wasn't nearly enough. We said we'd go to the summer festival together too. I'm sure we'll see plenty of beautiful fireworks. Let's go check out all the stands too. Yukatas are too stiff to move in, so I don't want to wear one, but I guess I might as well if it'll make Hinata happy.

Once this battle's over, I'm sure we'll have plenty of time on our hands. The three of us can go to a bunch of different places. We can go to faraway places too. Now that I think about it, we haven't gone on any field trips. How about we go visit Tamako, Anzu, and Chikage's hometowns? Yuuna's hometown is especially far away, so maybe we can't go there yet, huh. But I'm sure the three of us can go there someday.



Once this battle's over, I wonder what sort of life we'll live? Our hero duties will be over, so I wonder if we'll live like normal middle schoolers. Maybe we'll have to think about our academic and professional career paths. Maybe we'll start feeling sad once graduation comes about. But I'm sure we'll laugh it off and agree to be friends forever.

Even those days--

(Even those days will be fun, don't you think? Hinata? Yuuna?)

So we can't let the world end.

Daitengu-- Its association with fire runs deep. According to legend, it burned down the heavens in one night and destroyed half of Kyoto in a large fire. As one of the three great evil yokai, this demon of fire was an unfathomable force and a threat to even the gods.

Wakaba focused her concentration.

From the moment she imbued herself with Daitengu, she instinctively understood how to use its power.

-"Roooohhhhhh!!!"

She yelled out in fighting spirit and the bubble surrounding her began to boil away.

In just a few seconds, the bubble was nothing more than mist in the air.

A veil of fire surrounded itself around Wakaba, as if to protect her.

Daitengu's flame had once burned down the heavens, and now it bore its fangs at the monsters who came down from the heavens.

-"Haaaahhh!!"

Wakaba charged at the bubble Vertex as it was the closest. With a flash of her unsheathed blade, flames engulfed the cut Vertex, burning it to nothingness.

Before even a moment had passed, Wakaba cleaved the nearby four-horned Vertex in half. Flames burned as this Vertex too disappeared.

The flames surrounding Wakaba grew infinitely bigger and stronger. As if to fully cover the Forestized world--

Amidst the intensity of that heat, the common Vertexes burned up one by one.

From within the blazing flames, Wakaba set her sights on the two remaining large Vertexes: the last body of the segmented Vertex she had nearly finished off, and the arrow-mouthed Vertex.

Wakaba herself was no exception to the damage of the flame's heat. Her hero outfit was burning away, her skin inflamed with burns.

-"We humans... are weak. We're cowardly, fragile, and prone to malice... But even so..."

Even so, Wakaba believed. She believed in human strength.

After all, as long as they had something to protect, there was no limit to how strong humans could become.

Even now, no matter how wounded Wakaba was, she could still fight as long as it meant protecting those important to her. She could get back up and fight without losing her morale.

That's what set humanity apart from these monsters.

-"This is why we... even as weak humans... can defeat you monsters, no matter how strong you are!"

The flames engulfing her still burning, Wakaba gripped her sword firmly and closed in on the remaining two large Vertexes.

Wakaba fought on with the wrath of an Asura, ready to sacrifice her own body if need be.

With sword and flame, she began destroying every last Vertex-- large and common alike.

Eventually, her body became too battered to even stand, and as she fell to the ground--

She was all alone in the Jukai.

Every last Vertex had been annihilated.

(Hinata... Yuuna... I... protected... everything...)

Her consciousness finally faded.

The next time Wakaba woke up, she found herself in a hospital room. The same white room she had become familiarized with ever since she began her duties as a hero.

And sitting right beside her bed was Hinata, who hugged Wakaba tearfully as soon as she realized she was awake.

-"Wakaba-chan!! Thank goodness... you woke up...!"

-"Hinata..."

-"The invading Vertexes... were all defeated thanks to you and Yuuna-san's efforts. You protected Shikoku. But... you haven't waken up all this time... You've been asleep for over a week already..."

-"It's been... that long, huh... Ow!!"

-"Ah, I'm sorry!"

Hinata quickly stepped back away from Wakaba. The hug had hurt Wakaba due to the injuries she had incurred in the battle with the Vertexes.



Wakaba had broken several bones, injured some internal organs, and burned or otherwise wounded the entire rest of her body-- Without the Shinju's divine protection granted unto her as a hero, her injuries would have been undoubtedly fatal.

-"It's okay... More importantly, how's Yuuna?"

-"...!"

As soon as she had heard Yuuna's name, Hinata's body stiffened. The mere sight of that reaction caused Wakaba to fear for the worst.

-"... No way..."

Hinata looked down and answered in a bitter tone.

-"During her battle with the Vertexes... Yuuna-san's vital signs ceased... Her body has not been discovered... but they say there's no possibility that she survived..."

-"...!"

The heroes' locations were indicated on the smartphone map. The Taisha had a constant reading on the heroes' vital signs. If that signal had disappeared, then that meant--

-"Yuuna... is dead..."

A trembling voice seeped out of Wakaba's mouth.

-"Huh... n-no... no... Everyone... died...? No heroes survived... except... for me..."

Yuuna. She was always bright, and always cared for those around her. How many times had she been there to save Wakaba?

Tamako. She was always boisterous, always competitive. How many times had she been there to cheer Wakaba up?

Anzu. Always mature, always worked hard despite lacking the disposition for fighting. How dazzling her proactive nature was to behold.

Chikage. They may have fought. They may have argued. But Wakaba did not hate how human she was.

But-- now--

She had lost all of them.

-"Ugh... uugh...!!"

A groaning voice seeped from Wakaba's lips.

Wakaba required a long stay in the hospital for recovery and medical treatment.

Hinata visited her every day.

One day, Hinata spoke to Wakaba as she peeled an apple given as a sort of hospital visit gift.

-"We lost so many things... But thanks to everyone's efforts, Shikoku has been successfully defended. The barrier has been strengthened, too. It's apparently become impenetrable to things like common Vertexes."

-"I see... That's good..."

-"Apparently the Taisha are in discussions to designate Shikoku as a land protected by the Shinju's roots-- in other words, a 'Neno-Katasu-Kuni', a nation of the roots."

-"... Okay..."

Wakaba answered half-heartedly as she listened to Hinata. All the words seemed to stream in through one ear and out the other.

Hinata made sure to give Wakaba space. Instead of forcefully trying to encourage her more than necessary, she simply continued to stay by her side.

Hinata gently touched Wakaba's hand. Wakaba's body was still riddled with painful-looking burn scars.

-"You pushed yourself so far..."

Even with all the modern skin transplant and cosmetic surgery at their disposal, it seemed that these burn scars could not all be completely healed. But Wakaba was okay with that. To her, it felt like erasing all traces of her war scars would erase the fact that the war itself had happened-- Like it would erase the memories of the friends who had fought beside her. That would be even more sad in Wakaba's eyes.

-"..."

Hinata's eyes were watching Wakaba. But something about those eyes made them seem all too empty and cold. As if she had lost all emotion. As if she were looking at Wakaba but not seeing anything-- As if her consciousness were somewhere else.

-"Hinata, what's wrong...? Thinking about something?"

-"Hmm, well... Since Shikoku's probably going to be at peace, I was wondering what I should do with you from now on, Wakaba-chan."

-"... What?"

-"Please get better soon. I'm sure... everything will be fine now..."



Perhaps the strengthening of the barrier was successful. As the Taisha had said, there had been no more Vertex invasions in Shikoku since that final battle.

Since Wakaba could fully dedicate herself to medical treatment rather than fighting, her recovery had progressed quite well.

The seasons were changing.

Time was flowing.

For a while, nothing unexpected happened.

Eventually Wakaba was discharged and was able to return to school. But now that the classroom only had two students, it felt like it had already lost its purpose.

But then one day, the Taisha gave Wakaba an assignment as a hero. It felt like it had been ages since she had done anything as a hero.

According to the Taisha, abnormal activity had been observed in Vertexes outside the barrier. It was not an incoming invasion, just some sort of strange movements, apparently. Wakaba was instructed to investigate.

Hinata and Wakaba now stood atop the Seto Inland Sea wall. Wakaba wore her hero outfit with sword in hand so that she could protect Hinata in case anything happened.

When they had previously investigated the colossal Vertex outside the wall, Hinata did not accompany the heroes out of fears she would be a burden. But this time, Hinata decided to accompany Wakaba out of her own volition. She wanted to see the outside world.

Now, due to the barrier's visual obstruction, the other side of the wall appeared to be calm without anything happening out of the ordinary.

-"Let's go, Hinata. It's a terrible sight out there, so I'm sure it'll be hard to look at, though..."

-"It's okay. I'm prepared..."

Wakaba and Hinata walked to the other side of the wall together. The moment the crossed it, the sight of everything around them suddenly changed.

Exposing the world in its true form.

Outside the wall were countless common Vertexes. They were swarming together, attacking the barrier in an attempt to get in, only to be repelled.

The barrier indeed seemed to be strengthened. Now it seemed that common Vertexes could not enter no matter how many of them grouped up together.

Several began to attack Wakaba and Hinata upon noticing their presence. Wakaba cut them all down before they could even get close to Hinata.

(I don't want... to lose anything or anyone else. At the very least, Hinata should be...)

As she defeated the common Vertexes, she kept her eye on the Seto Ohashi Bridge. That one colossal Vertex was over there. In the previous invasion, that Vertex did not make its appearance. Instead, seven other large Vertexes attacked in its place.

Upon closer inspection of the colossal Vertex, there were no more common Vertexes fusing to it. The body was already complete, but it showed no signs of moving. It was several times bigger than any of the other large Vertexes that had previously invaded Shikoku.

In addition to the colossal Vertex, there were also several developing large Vertexes scattered around here and there. Large Vertexes identical in appearance to ones defeated in the past were reemerging as well.

-"How... could this be...?"

An utterance of despair seeped from Wakaba's mouth.

The heroes had sustained heavy injuries and even death to defeat those large Vertexes. And yet those Vertexes were just endlessly regenerating themselves time after time, Vertex after Vertex.

To make matters worse, the reemerging large Vertexes weren't exactly like their predecessors. The large Vertexes the heroes had defeated were hollow. But the now-forming Vertexes-- each had something glowing inside. Wakaba and Hinata couldn't tell what it was, but there was something inside those hollow shells... The Vertexes were further evolving. Further strengthening.

Hinata wordlessly gazed upon the scene before her. The harsh reality of the sight had Wakaba nearly on her knees, yet Hinata simply gazed on. As if to ascertain the world itself.

--!

----!

------!

Suddenly, a repulsive sound began echoing from the colossal Vertex. A sound somehow beyond human understanding. Meanwhile, its body began to shine with an ominous light. The lights began to flicker changing colors with irregular frequency and intensity.

-"What...!?"

The unpleasant sound continued echoing. And as if in response to the colossal Vertex's sound and flickering lights, the other large Vertexes began flickering as well.

And from beyond the sea, a pulsating sound began pounding.

The air shook. The seas raged.



The pulsating beat grew bigger, stronger.

(I don't know what's going on... but it can't be anything good...!)

Wakaba clenched her fists. Should she take Hinata and run? But where? This anomaly was on a global scale. There was nowhere to run.

The ground began to tremble.

-"Uwah!?"

-"Kyah!"

The tremors were intense enough to throw them off balance. The ground kept swaying without any sign of stopping. No, the tremors were actually growing stronger.

-"Hinata, hold onto my hand!"

-"Okay!"

Hinata caught Wakaba's outstretched hand.

From beyond the sea, a sound like the cry of a beast added to the cacophony. The ominous discord spread out across the world.

The Vertexes' flickering grew more intense.

Pillars of light rained down from the sky unto the sea, causing whirlpools. It was as if holes had been drilled in the bottom of the sea.

-"Amenonuboko... the heavenly jeweled spear..."

Hinata murmured dumbfoundedly.

A gigantic ball of flame appeared from over the horizon. The sun? But it was way too gigantic, and th sun was already out in the sky.

The second sun grew larger and larger as did its luminance.

The pillars of light continued stirring the sea. The land continued to tremble. The dissonance continued to echo.

The second sun grew large enough to cover the entire sky before slowly begining its descent.

The heavens-- were falling--

The falling sun's light and heat soaked into the world.

Wakaba could no longer see anything. Nothing but a white world. A world of nothing but light. The world was eaten by the heavens.

But-- in Wakaba could still feel the sensation of Hinata's hand in hers.

-"Hinata!!"

Despite not being able to see anything, in a split second decision, Wakaba pulled Hinata into her arms and leapt backwards.

Behind her was the inside of the barrier.

Once they returned inside the barrier, the world changed.

The ordinary sight of the Seto Inland Sea spread out around them.

-"What... on earth was that...?"

Wakaba turned pale as she let Hinata out from within her arms.

Hinata had turned pale as well.

-"I have no idea... But... I think it'd be best we not go outside the barrier for now..."

-"... Yeah..."

Wakaba lost all strength in her body and fell to her knees.

What exactly had just happened to this world?

After some time had passed, Wakaba and Hinata hesitantly tried stepping outside the barrier.

-"...!!"

Wakaba and Hinata's eyes popped. What spread out before them was a completely different world. The land was pulsating with an ominous crimson color, covered with what looked like lava. Every now and then, crimson flames gushed out from the land. And as if to simply mark their territory, common Vertexes were swarming across both the earth and the sky. Yet for some reason, all of the large Vertexes had disappeared.

Not a trace remained of the globe as it had once been.

Wakaba gazed at the sight in shock.

-"Has the world... been destroyed...?"





-"No... 'destroyed' isn't the right word. The logic of the world itself has been rewritten...!"

Throughout the entire world, not a single thing born of human hands remained.

Not the houses people lived in.

Nor the skyscrapers in the cities.

Nor the fields Shiratori plowed.

Everything had been lost.

Complete and total eradication. Any hope of survival had been cut off.

-"Any possibility of a comeback for humanity... has been crushed, hasn't it..."

Hinata clenched her fist as she gazed upon the transfigured world.

All that remained of the world was what little the barrier could protect in Shikoku.

-"Damn... it..."

Wakaba clenched her teeth. Almost hard enough to snap them. Rage. Regret. Frustration. Despair. Sorrow. All sorts of mixed emotions welled up inside her--

After they had returned to Marugame City, Hinata reported to the Taisha what had happened outside the barrier.

Several other miko had received oracles when the world had been rewritten, so the Taisha had a grasp on the situation as well.

Thankfully, the strengthening of the barrier was completed in time, allowing Shikoku to narrowly escape its apparent utter destruction. Although humanity's natural predator had rewritten the logic of the world, the interior of the Shinju's barrier was outside of their scope. Perhaps Shikoku was indeed worthy of being called a "Neno-Katasu-Kuni".

Wakaba and the other heroes were able to successfully keep the invasion of Shikoku in check long enough for the barrier to be strengthened in time. And thus, humanity escaped its annihilation.

However-- the moment the Shinju ran out of power would perhaps be the moment humanity met with extinction.

After finishing her investigation mission, Wakaba began training harder than ever.

Though she had lost all of her teammates, Wakaba swung her sword alone and forged her body.



Including the abnormally colossal Vertex, twelve large Vertexes were confirmed in total. For the sake of convenience, the Taisha named these twelve after the twelve constellations of the zodiac.

It felt appropriate to christen these heavenly entities with the names of heavenly bodies.

Though the barrier had been strengthened, safety was not guaranteed for eternity. The twelve large Vertexes had disappeared for now, but by no means did that meant the Vertexes were gone for good. They would most likely reappear one day.

And when that day arrived, it could only be a matter of time before even the strengthened barrier's defenses are breached.

If--

If all twelve of those monsters came attacking at once, Wakaba would have to stand up to them all by herself. It would likely be the most hopeless of battles yet.

(But even so... I'll have to do it. If I fall back, then everything my friends fought for, and the lives they sacrificed, will be for nothing... I must continue to protect this world and its people... at all costs...!)

With heroic determination in her heart, Wakaba once again trained herself at Marugame Castle's inner citadel today. She swung her sword until the sun set, when her arms became too fatigued to even move. It was then that Hinata appeared.

"I see you're training again today."

"Yeah. ... It's my obligation as the one who survived."

Hinata watched Wakaba. Her eyes were cold with somehow unreadable emotion.

"... There's just one thing I'd like to talk about."

Once they were in Wakaba's dorm room, Hinata started speaking.

"Wakaba-chan, there's no more need for you to fight."

"... That's not true!"

Almost reflexively, Wakaba denied Hinata's words.

Does she mean the Vertexes would no longer attack because of the strengthened barrier? But the barrier's power isn't absolute. That's why I have to fight--

Before Wakaba could speak her mind, Hinata continued matter-of-factly.

-"The barrier will endure for now, but once the Shinju-sama's power runs out, we will be engulfed in the sea of flames, and all will be over. You could say that human extinction is already complete. Indeed... it was -because- of the desperate situation so far... that we found a means of survival."

-"... What?"

-"This was our first attempt, but it was a success. We have named this divine ritual the 'offering fire festival'."

-"What's this about...?"

Instead of answering Wakaba's question, Hinata continued speaking in an emotionless voice. "The Taisha held a festival. Outside the wall... They spoke to the heavens and prayed, asking for amnesty from invasions on the condition that we no longer leave this land."

-"They... spoke? How is that even--"

-"There is precedent for receiving amnesty in such a way dating back to the ancient age of gods. ... In accordance with the heavenly command, I will at once yield up this Ashihara-no-Nakat-sukuni, the Central Land of Reed-Plains. But as to my place of residence, if ye will make stout the temple pillars on the nethermost rock-bottom, and make high the cross-beams to Taka-ma-ga-hara, the Plain of High Heaven, like the rich and perfect august nest where the august child of the Heavenly Gods rules the succession of the Heaven's sun, and will deign to establish me, I will hide in the eighty (less than a hundred) road-windings, and wait on him...

-The king of land gods once pledged this oath to the heavenly gods. He would not leave his dwelling place on the condition that he be granted amnesty from any other aggressions. And now, we followed in that example."

Rituals and ceremonies are simply the symbolic reproduction of agreements made in legends. The Taisha copied the events told in the legend of "the Abdication of Okuninushi" in order to seek amnesty from the heavenly gods.

-"The enemy's goal is probably the extermination of the land dwellers-- in ohther words, us. They've pretty much effectively achieved that goal now, and so it's only because of that timing that this was all possible. As miko, we receive oracles. We hear the voices of gods And as miko... we had our side of the story heard... by heaven."

-"... How...?"

Miko hear the voices of gods. But up until now, all communications with the Shinju have been one way: from gods to humans. Just how exactly did human words reach the those in the heavens?

-"--Through the sea of fire."

-"...!?"

-"Six miko were chosen."



-"Wait, don't tell me they were sacrificed...!?"

-"I'm only telling you this after the fact because they knew you'd be against it."

Hinata kept speaking with a detached, emotionless tone.

-"Hinata... you!"

Without thinking, Wakaba forcefully grabbed Hinata by the shoulders. It had to have hurt, but Hinata didn't move so much as an eyebrow.

-"I was originally supposed to be chosen as a sacrifice as well."

-"Wha...!?"

-"But I played my cards right and excluded myself from the selection. I didn't want to die. I'm such a unfair, cruel woman."

Hinata smiled weakly.

A callous smile unfitting of the usual Uesato Hinata. It was the look of a cold, shrewd, selfish girl.

But--

But that's why Wakaba understood.

As her childhood friend, only Wakaba understood.

-"Don't say it like that! Hinata... it was because of me, right? You stayed behind out of concern for me. If I lost you too, I'd... No, I'm sorry. I know it must've been tough for you too... I'm sorry for projecting onto you..."

The moment Wakaba said that, a single line of tears formed on Hinata's cheek. Without changing her facial expression, without changing her emotions, Hinata wept.

-"... There wasn't any other path left for us to take. Wakaba-chan... not even you can possibly keep fighting forever all alone... You heroes have given everything so far. So now it was time for the miko to give everything."

Wakaba wordlessly clenched her fist.

-"After the ceremony was over... an oracle came in. If we remain in these lands and abandon our hero powers, we will no longer be attacked."

-"... Relinquish your power or else, huh..."

-"Perhaps... it's taboo for humans to use divine power. According to them, at least."

-"Khh...!"

Wakaba said nothing. For there truly was no other way. As long as she lacked the power to protect others herself, she had no right to raise any complaints.

-"Uuugghhh... uggghhh, ghaaaaaaaaahhhh!!"

Wakaba fell to her knees, screaming. Weeping.

She had lived as a hero for four long years. But no matter how strict her training was, she had never felt this much anguish. No matter how badly she got injured in battle, she never felt this much pain. No matter how much the unseen future had pressured her, she never felt this much sadness.

She couldn't protect her friends.

She couldn't prevent the sacrifice of so many lives.

She couldn't reclaim the happiness stolen from them.

-"... How can I be... so... powerless...! Uggghhh....!!"

For a long time, Wakaba wept.

Hinata said nothing and simply sat beside her.

The sun set and night arrived.

Eventually Wakaba's throat dried out and her tears depleted.

After a lifetime's worth of tears, she finally looked up.

Before she had realized it, the night had ended, and the morning sun shined through her window.

Wakaba and Hinata stood together atop Marugame Castle's inner citadel.

From there, they could see the sunrise, the inhabited city streets, and the Seto Inland Sea beyond.

No longer was Wakaba's face tinged with sorrow or despair.

Since she had cried enough tears for a lifetime, she had no tears left to shed.

Not now, not ever.

-"Hinata. We've lost so much..."

-"We did."



-"But we survived."

-"Yes, we did!"

-"In that case, our battle's not over yet."

-"I agree."

Hinata answered firmly, causing a smile to form on Wakaba's face. Their wills were one in the same.

-"... Alright. Let's try sorting out the current situation based on things like the latest oracle."

Hinata nodded.

-"Our enemies are gods. Heavenly gods. ... Gods who want us humans extinct. We don't know the reason why, but at the very least, they hate human use of divine power."

-"Our allies are also gods. Land gods. ... Gods who protect us from the heavenly gods' attempt at human extermination. These land gods conglomerated to form the Shinju-sama..."

-"Four years ago-- on that fateful July. When the cataclysmic event occurred, the heavenly gods and the land gods were fighting. And the land gods lost. ... As the victors, the heavenly gods sent down the Vertexes. The land gods joined forces to form the Shinju and bestowed humans with divine power."

-"Correct. And the only ones who could combat the Vertexes constructed by gods-- were the heroes who had divine power."

The heroes' power was derived from the Shinju-- in other words, from the land gods. The land gods' power allowed one to oppose the forces of the heavenly gods... And those who had that power were called heroes.

-"We repelled the Vertexes, but we've been driven this far up against the wall... bringing us to talks of reconciliation. Which brings us to now..."

-"We're at an overwhelming disadvantage. But through several sacrifices... humanity survived."

Hinata and Wakaba's voices were both heavy. But they were not simply depressed.

-"This is nothing more than a temporary truce. We fought hard enough to escape extinction. We just need to store that strength and build it up until we can achieve our dearest wish... Historically, it's not a rare situation at all. It's true that we can't win as we are right now. We have no choice but to accept that truth. But it's for that very reason... that we must build up the strength to win."

-"Indeed. Despite how I might look, I am angry. Let's make sure we recover. Once we lose the Shinju-sama, we lose Shikoku as well, but the Shinju-sama should have a lifetime of hundreds of years. Let's use that time to find a counter strategy."

Hinata declared resolutely.

Just how much time would humanity need to gain the strength to defeat the heavens? The path ahead of them is endless, difficult, and all too dangerous.

But it is a journey that must be made.

-"... About Yuuna..."

-"After her vital signs disappeared, she became part of the Shinju-sama... At least, that is what I believe... Perhaps taking her in was part of how the Shinju-sama's barrier was strengthened..."

Hinata chose her words carefully as she answered.

-"I see... Yuuna was a really good guy. I always felt like she had the heart of a god or a buddha... but to think that even the gods have gotten stronger because of her."

Though that seemed like a possibility for Yuuna, both Wakaba and Hinata truly felt like that was the case.

As a hero, Yuuna gave her friends strength.

And now, as a part of the Shinju, she continues to give the gods strength as well.

-"Her feelings probably protected Shikoku. She truly is a Living God (Arahitogami)."

-"... Say, Hinata. If she's a part of the Shinju... then can you talk to her as a miko...?"

Wakaba asked with just the faintest hint of expectation.

But Hinata shook her head.

-"... It would be wonderful if that happened... It's not like it would be a sin if it did... but unfortunately, the Shinju-sama's status has not changed much from how it was previously."

-"I... see... But let's keep looking for possibilities. Some sort of miracle to bring everyone back..."

-"I feel the same way..."

But in the back of their minds, they knew:

Lost lives do not come back.

To fix the mood, Wakaba steered the conversation back to more realistic things.

-"The main problem is that if things continue the way they are, then the hero system will have to be abandoned."



-"We won't be able to do such large-scale research publicly anymore, huh... We'll have no choice but to be patient and do it the long, drawn-out way. We need to show complete allegiance for the time being."

-"True..."

Humanity was abandoning its war potential.

But it was not a complete surrender. It was not a permanent cease-fire.

-"So what exactly do we have to do for the time being?

Hinata already seemed to have a plan in mind as she answered Wakaba's question without any hesitation.

-"First, we will rename the Taisha from 'grand shrine' to 'amnesty' as a self-conscious reminder that we have been granted amnesty and live modestly as human beings."

-"Amnesty... what a humiliating name. But that's what will make it a reminder. A reminder of the hopelessness of defeat. The sorrow of having everything stolen away."

-"Yes. And the biggest goal of the name change is to use it as an excuse to reorganize the structure of the organization. The way it is now, it is excessively crude as an organization. We need to rebuild it as a more secretive organization."

-"..."

-"This is a job for me and Aki-san... and the rest of the remaining miko. As oracle receivers, we must conduct ourselves properly. I'm a cruel woman after all."

-"... Then my role is to maintain the emotional stability of the citizens, huh. To guide the people in life. And underneath the table, we build our strength. There are so many things we need to do, huh. First, we need to improve the base power level of the hero system. Big time. The enemy can't clearly see what goes on deep within the underworld protected by the Shinju's roots."

-"With time and science... I'm sure we can advance the system to the point we can defeat the enemy and find a way to return the logic of the world back to normal. We've got gods on our side too, you know."

Let's trick those heavenly gods.

Sooner or later, let's prepare enough power to ascend to their level.

Just bide time and wait until then.

-"For now, we'll call a truce... but I swear..."





-"Yes. Let's swear that we'll recover. We'll reclaim normal life for everyone."

Wakaba and Hinata held hands as if to ascertain each other's existence.

It was their obligation for surviving at the cost of the sacrifices of others. To succeed the wills of the deceased and to clear a path for the future.

It was a heavy burden for such young girls.

But they had the resolve.

-"... What's frightening is the thought of our rebellious spirit fading over the course of this long battle... I can't help but worry about it, even now..."

-"Let's just do whatever it is we can. Like leaving something behind for future heroes-- or something."

And thus, Nogi continued her dty as the sole surviving hero-- or rather, she stood at the head of all legendary heroes who had previously graced the earth.

The Vertex invasion was halted and humanity welcomed a time of peace.

Year One Divine Era (1 DE)--

Their lives spared, humanity restructures the Taisha from the "Grand Shrine" to "Amnesty" and reforms the calendar system to the new "Divine Era" commemorating the Shinju.

72 DE--

The last survivor of the Vertex invasion dies of old age.

100 DE--

Humanity reaches its hundredth year of peace.

Zero Vertex invasions since the beginning of the Divine Era.

The very words "Vertex", "Hero", and "Uranophobia" lose their sense of reality and become archaic words used only in historical contexts.

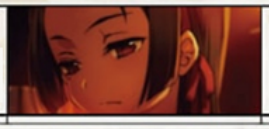
However, one peculiar cultural practice remains. Girls who exhibit certain specific actions at the time of their birth-- such as reverse clapping-- are given the name "Yuuna" by the Taisha in reverence to the legendary hero Takashima Yuuna. Perhaps in quiet defiance against the heavenly gods.

Furthermore, in commemoration of the year 100, as well as to protect the mental stability of the population, all records of the Vertex menace are erased. Instead, the explanation that a deadly Virus destroyed the world outside of Shikoku is circulated and takes root.

However.
Hidden away from nearly all of humanity, development on the hero system continues.
After years upon years, all of that work will come to hold a significant meaning.
Entrusting hope onto the future--

(Nogi Wakaba is a Hero END)


特別書きおろし番外編
託されたバトン
Takusareta baton



The Passed Baton

A flame flickered on a candlewick inside the dim shrine. That single source of light shined upon a group of people sitting in a circle within the darkness.

Those gathered were primarily Shinto priests belonging to the Taisha (Amnesty). Ones with particularly high influence at that.

And yet those high-ranking priests were not the ones in charge here. That honor fell upon a mere middle school girl-- Uesato Hinata.

Hinata was the one who gathered the priests today, saying she had extremely important business with them.

And they were tense.

By successfully guiding the sole surviving hero, Nogi Wakaba, Uesato Hinata had gained immense influence. Furthermore, she had recently been gaining even more power within the Taisha by rallying several other prominent miko, starting with Aki Masuzu.

Having the highest authority as a miko, the girl sat calmly in the formal seiza position with her eyes closed, not at all intimidated by the adults surrounding her. Her silent posture commanded a reverent silence throughout the shrine, with an air of gravitas that weighed down on the priests. They were completely subjugated by the dignity of a girl far younger than they.

Placed before each priest was a bundle of papers.

The flickering candle flame.

The breathtaking silence.

The overwhelming gravity.

The priests looked at the miko, waiting for her words.

Eventually, Uesato Hinata slowly opened her eyes--

And began to speak.

-"Now then, please read the first page of the proposal. Today we will discuss proposed methods to bring about new innovations and updates to the hero system, entitled the "Founding Hero Motivation Project". Please continue to the second page."

In accordance with Hinata's words, the priests solemnly flipped the pages on the proposals placed before them.

At the same time, a presentation slideshow projected onto a screen before them.

Some of the more elderly priests gasped in awe at the animated text filling the screen as they were unfamiliar with computers.

Hinata continued with an outline of the project.

-"This project will commit great efforts to maintain the mental health of the heroes--"

Two days prior.

-"A plan to strengthen the hero system...?"

Hinata was in Wakaba's room to clean her ears for her when Wakaba came up with suggestions regarding the hero system.
"Yeah, I was thinking it would be worth it if we could help out any future heroes, even if just a little. And I'm not just talking about simple firepower enhancements here. I'm talking about adding mental health support systems, too."

Hinata was in Wakaba's room to clean her ears for her when Wakaba came up with suggestions regarding the hero system.

-"Yeah, I was thinking it would be worth it if we could help out any future heroes, even if just a little. And I'm not just talking about simple firepower enhancements here. I'm talking about adding mental health support systems, too."

A hero's fight was not just physical, but mental as well. Heroes may be physically superhuman, but mentally, they were normal girls. Sensitive, fragile, breakable. The underlying cause of Chikage's tragedy was in fact her emotional defenselessness.

-"Mental health support... That would indeed be desirable if possible."

The mind is a complex thing. If you asked a thousand psychologists how to maintain a healthy mind, you very well may receive a thousand answers.

-"I don't have any concrete ideas on what that would entail either, but... I do have a small suggestion. Let's see. How about this? When you transform, you can hear my voice no matter where you are."

-"...!"

Upon hearing that suggestion, Hinata's body froze, and she stopped cleaning Wakaba's ear for a second.

-"... If I could hear Wakaba-chan's voice from anywhere, that would be a little -too- wonderful."

-"I know, right!? We can use recordings of all the heroes' voices, too."

-"That sounds nice! I know it would boost my strength at least a hundredfold. And it's just voice playback, so I'm sure it's possible."

-"Alright! Then let's get to it!"

-"S-so... Wakaba-chan... Exactly what sort of things will you say?"

Hinata looked at Wakaba with expectant eyes.

After quite a long period of careful consideration, Wakaba gave her triumphant reply:

-"'Don't give up!' 'Get up!' 'You can do this!' You know, a bunch of positive things over and over!"

Hinata's eyes gleamed at Wakaba's words.

-"Oh my, that's so wonderful...!"

-"I know, right!?"

-"I'm sure it'll motivate the future heroes so much that nothing can defeat them!"

-"Yeah, yeah! It's a good idea if I do say so myself!"

-"Let's quickly get it proposed to the Taisha! We can write up the proposal right now! We can do it overnight! Let's pull an all-nighter to get this proposal done!"

The two girls worked up a storm.

Hinata began drafting the proposal on her computer, and by the next morning, they had produced a proposal with dozens of pages. And without a wink of sleep in-between, she left Marugame Castle and headed to the Taisha.

Meanwhile, Wakaba thought about what sort of words to leave for the heroes of tomorrow, concentrating as seriously as she would while training.

Meanwhile, Wakaba thought about what sort of words to leave for the heroes of tomorrow, concentrating as seriously as she would while training.

And now, Hinata was giving their presentation to the Taisha priests.

After finishing the last page of the proposal,Hinata bowed her head.

-"And that is my proposal. I declare this to be a quintessential element to add to the grand design of the hero system. Thank you for your consideration."

The next day, Hinata returned to Marugame Castle.

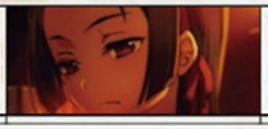
With an extremely disappointed look on her face.

-"They rejected it..."

-"WHAT!? Why!?"

Wakaba had already handwritten fifty pages of words to record for the heroes of the future. She was planning to record words of encouragement for several different situations: "For your first battle" "For when you're winning" "For when you use abilities" "For when you strike an enemy through an opening" "For when you're scared of a powerful enemy" "For when you start to hate others" "For when you're sad" "For when you're hungry" and so forth.

-"They said... you wouldn't be able to concentrate if you kept hearing voices throughout the battle."



-"Ugh...! Well, that may be true..."

-"And that those chosen as heroes should at least be able to fight without such encouragement in the first place."

-"Mgh..."

Not even Wakaba had anything to refute that point.

She sighed.

-"Whew... Well, nothing we can do about that. Just let it go, I guess."

-"No!! There is no need for us to let it go!"

Hinata leaned forward in a shout.

-"The proposal may have been rejected, but there's nothing inherently wrong about a system for founding heroes to support their successors! When I first heard your suggestion, everything just seemed to click!"

-"Whoa, you think so too, Hinata!?"

-"Of course. So that's where I came up with a plan that could quite come in handy."

-"... What sort of plan?"

Wakaba curiously asked.

Basking in the intense gaze of her childhood friend, Hinata cleared her throat.

-"The fairy system, Wakaba-chan. The fairy system."

Wakaba's eyes widened.

-"But I thought they were removing that function since it was dangerous to let fairies into your body, right?"

-"That's right. But if we used artificial... that is, pseudo-fairies, there'd be no harm done, don't you think?"

Wakaba quickly caught on to what Hinata was implying.

-"I get it! So I can become a fairy like Yoshitsune, huh? I see, I see. That way I can always keep fighting alongside the future heroes!"

Wakaba imagined what she'd look like as a fairy. That said, not even the heroes themselves could see the fairies, so she simply imagined it. She pictured herself as something of a graceful guardian spirit watching over the future heroes at their side.

... Of course, Wakaba was unaware of the mascot-like appearance "fairies" would take approximately 300 years later.

-"Mmm, that could be cool! And it'll reassure the future heroes I fight alongside too. They'll know they're not alone.
Alright, let's do this!"

-"Um, I'm sorry, but there's no sort of technique to become a fairy like what you're thinking of."

-"Mgh, I see..."

The immediate rejection saddened Wakaba once more.

-"But creating a pseudo-fairy might be possible. Not a fairy with any abilities or anything, but more like a video image that you can replay."

-"Replay...?"

-"Try to recall all your battles so far. The accumulation of impurities from the fairies brought about negative voices and images, right? But a pseudo-fairy of Wakaba-chan would bring about positive voices and images."

-"So... just voices and images, huh?"

-"Yes. That's probably all that's possible."

-"But... If that's all, won't it still get in the way during battle?"

Hinata smiled and replied.

-"That's why we'll limit it to only during times it won't get in the way. Like when a hero succumbs to an enemy's psychological attack. Or when a hero becomes emotionally ill due to battle. During times like those, your pseudo-fairy will appear and encourage them."

-"That way it won't become a nuisance in battle, huh."

-"Indeed. I'm sure that the sudden appearance of your pseudo-fairy will be a big impact on heroes in times like those. ... Well, I could say it's like those yokai that get into your head, but that'd be mean."

-"That's way too mean!"

Hinata smiled and said "It's a joke" to try and calm down Wakaba's anger. Obviously, Wakaba understood it was a joke, but that didn't make her any less mad. That was just how those two got along.

-"But before you get any hopes up, Wakaba-chan, I want you to make sure you understand that this is little more than a motivational recording of you. I do believe it'll work as a warm encouragement, but that's all it is, and nothing more. There's no guarantee that your voice and images will all get through to them. It may even be nothing more than abstract images... In the end, it's still up to each heartbroken hero herself to get back up on her own."

Wakaba nodded.

-"Fine by me. If there's even the slightest chance I can help... then I'll take it."

And thus, the Wakaba Pseudo-Fairy Project was set into motion, even gaining Taisha approval. Some Taisha members expressed doubt at the plan's efficacy, but Hinata stood her ground and kept vying for approval.

The next day after receiving Taisha approval, Hinata went to the Marugame Castle classroom, but Wakaba had yet to arrive. Usually, Wakaba would arrive first and prepare the chalk for the blackboard and water the flower vases.

Hinata sat in her seat and surveyed the classroom.

Now, only she and Wakaba attended. And yet the number of desks remained the same. Six.

A six student classroom.

Even if they had passed away, they were still classmates.

-"Wakaba isn't here yet! Tama's first!"

-"I'm sorry, Tamacchi-sempai... but Hinata-san got here before you."

-"Gaahh!"

-"It's okay, Tama-chan. There's always tomorrow!"

-"That's too naive, Takashima-san... There's always tomorrow... I'll do it tomorrow... Tomorrow for sure... When you say things like that, tomorrow never comes..."

-"Don't jinx it! Tama's gonna be the first one here tomorrow for sure!"

Hinata felt as if she could still hear voices like that.

She sat spacing out in the classroom alone.

Eventually ten, fifteen minutes passed.

-"... That's strange..."

Homeroom was about to start, but Wakaba hadn't arrived yet. Not even in elementary school had such a thing ever happened.
Hinata started to get worried.

Now that she thought about it, she hadn't seen Wakaba in the cafeteria this morning either. At the time, she assumed Wakaba had gone to school early so she didn't think much of it.

Hinata hadn't seen her once since they said goodnight last night. It had already been over ten hours since then.

Anything could've happened within that time.



Could a sudden Vertex attack have occurred? During Vertex invasions, Hinata wouldn't even realize the heroes were fighting.

What if Wakaba fought alone, and perished--?

No, forget about a Vertex attack. Wakaba could have just suddenly fallen ill. She could've fallen ill and suddenly died in her sleep.

She could've fallen ill and collapsed, unable to speak and then--

Or what if she got into some sort of accident? Wakaba sometimes spaces out, so maybe she fell asleep in the bath and--

Death through battle. Death by illness. Death by accident. Death by all sorts of unexpected events.

People die all too easily.

-"...!!"

Hinata leapt out of her seat and ran towards the classroom entrance.

(No, no, no, no, no, no, no!! I can't lose Wakaba-chan too...!!)

Why did she leave Wakaba-chan last night? She should've stayed with her. She shouldn't have let her out of her sight.

Yuuna passed away. Chikage passed away. Tamako passed away. Anzu passed away. They all passed away. In one short year, four of them were dead.

If she lost Wakaba too... she'd be all alone.

And if she were all alone, she wouldn't know... if she'd have the will to live anymore.

-"Wakaba-cha--"

-"Uwahh!"

The moment Hinata opened the classroom door, she found Wakaba standing right there before her. Wakaba seemed quite surprised. Perhaps she was just about to open the door herself.

-"What's wrong, Hinata? You look so pale."

-"Wa... Wakaba-chan..."

Wakaba didn't notice the quivering in Hinata's voice.

-"Thank goodness, I'm still on time, huh. I was so busy thinking about what to tell the heroes of the future that I couldn't sleep last night. So I woke up late."

-"Ugh, ughhh... uwaaaaahhhhhh!!"

Hinata clung to Wakaba and started crying.

-"H-hey, Hinata? What's wrong...?"

Wakaba looked bewildered by the sudden development.

-"I can't-- I can't help it...! Wakaba-chan... you... weren't coming, so I... I... *sniff* I thought I lost... I thought I lost you too... uwaaaahhh!!"

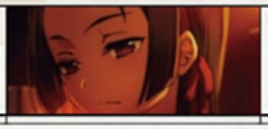
-"Hinata..."

Wakaba watched, somewhat surprised, as Hinata clung to her in tears.

Hinata had always seemed to be in control of her emotions. After Anzu and Tamako were killed, and when Chikage died, and when Yuuna died... she may have grieved in private, but she would never break down like this in the presence of others. Since she herself could not fight, she tried to at least act strong so as to not make those around her more depressed.

That's why both Wakaba and the adults around them had thought... that Uesato Hinata was a mature girl who remained calm no matter what.





But there was no way that was true.

She lost Anzu and Tamako.

She lost Chikage.

She lost Yuuna.

One by one, her friends died.

Anxiety. Fear. Sadness.

Anxiety. Anxiety. Anxiety.

Everything precious to her was there one day and gone the next.

Hinata had come to fear even the most trivial of things. And that was why her anxiety exploded, causing her to think "Four of my friends are dead! And there's no guarantee that more won't die, too!" and driving her to cry like a child.

-"Ugh, *sniff*... uugh..."

-"... I'm sorry. I must have worried you."

Wakaba gently stroked Hinata's head.

-"That's right... *sniff* you made me... worry..."

-"It's okay. I'm not going anywhere. I'm beside you always."

-"Yes... please stay with me... always..."

-"Yeah. We'll be together forever. Even after we graduate. Even after we grow up. Even after we're old ladies, we'll be together."

-"Promise... Promise...!"

-"I promise."

Wakaba patted Hinata on the head until she stopped crying.

After school that day, Wakaba and Hinata went to the broadcast room to record the message for the heroes of the future. Wakaba's voice data would later be handed to the Taisha for spiritual processing to be added into the hero system.

Wakaba sat in proper seiza position in front of a microphone attached to a computer. Hinata sat in front of the computer to operate the recording software.

-"Man, that's the first time I've seen you cry that much, Hinata."

-"...! Please don't bring that up again. It's embarrassing..."

Hinata blushed as she tapped away at the computer.

-"We should take a picture too, huh. Then again, you're always taking pictures of me, so--"

-"Wakaba-chan? You're making me mad, you know?"

Hinata spoke with a smile.

-"... I'm sorry."

Wakaba's instincts told her to back off on that subject.

Wakaba cleared her throat and turned to the microphone.

-"... It's been a while since I've used this microphone. I used it almost every day back when we had a connection with Shiratori-san."

It made her feel a little bit lonely.

-"That's true... It feels like so long ago."

No matter how much time passes, it hurts to think about dead friends. Immersing in this sadness can bring back a sweet sentimentality.

But you must never let the past consume you.

-"For as long as we live, we must never stop going forward... Right, Wakaba-chan?"

-"Yeah, that's right."

Hinata finished setting up the recording software, finishing preparations.

-"Now please face the microphone and start."

-"Okay..."

Wakaba began to speak with an ever so slightly strained face.

-"Greetings, fellow heroes of the future. I am Nogi Wakaba, a hero shouldering her duty in 2019 of the Common Era-- or rather-- the first year of the Divine Era. You may be living decades, or even centuries after me, but I entrust my hopes of the future to you.

Ever since the day the Vertexes first arrived, many things were stolen from us. To regain them, we stood up against our ferocious foes, and fought.

The first to fight were Shiratori Utano and Fujimori Mito.

Next came us. Takashima Yuuna, Koori Chikage, Doi Tamako, Iyojima Anzu, Uesato Hinata, and Nogi Wakaba.

Now in the first year of the Divine Era, Shikoku has been relieved from the war. But from the time I record this message to the time you hear it, many battles against the Vertexes may or may hot have occurred. Many heroes may or may not have been born.

How many, if any, I do not know.

But what I do know, is that at times, all heroes feel fear. Anxiety. Pain... Sometimes we question what we're really fighting for. If we're really protecting what we want to protect.

The heroes of our generation didn't start from scratch. Shiratori Utano handed us the baton.

And one day, we'll pass that baton to the next generation.

And they'll hand it to the next generation. And the next. And the next. And the next, next, next generation. And the next, next, next, next generation. Generation after Generation, time after time, no matter how long it takes... we'll keep passing that baton, I'm sure.

And the name of that baton... is 'Courage'. It's also known 'Hope'. And 'Prayer'.

Here in the present, I can do nothing for you in the future. Nothing but send you this voice of mine.

But I want you to believe. Standing behind you are all the heroes who've passed the baton before you.

I want you to look around. Standing beside you are all the friends and family who have spent time with you.

I want you to know that you are not alone. You are never alone.

You're probably suffering right now. I know. You're in pain. You're in sadness. You're in despair... It may seem as if no matter how hard you try, try, and try again, you still can't make it through. It's tough, I know. But that's exactly why you should be hearing my voice right now.

What I want to tell you isn't "fight harder" or "try harder".

It's... "live".

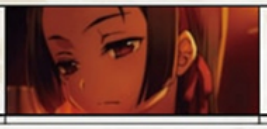
Please, just live.

If there's anyone precious to you, I want you to think of them, and get up. I want you to remember that if you give up on living now, it'll make them sad.

I've lost so many precious friends myself. So please, don't make your precious ones go through the same thing I did. Swear to me-- swear to them-- that you'll make it back--"

Wakaba took a deep breath and smiled in contentment.

-"It was a little long, but I think I said everything I wanted to say."



-"Tee hee hee. You're not just leaving behind a hero system. You've added the perfect spice to it."

-"... Yeah. I want to make the system as strong as possible for the heroes of the future."

-"Indeed. But advancing ambitions while deceiving the enemy takes the utmost caution. Remember that simply strengthening the foundations will take an extraordinary amount of time... If you're not careful, it could put everything on hold."

If the heavenly gods found out that the hero system still existed and attacked in retaliation, everything would be for naught.

-"I know. I heard it'll be a long, drawn out research period. There's no need to add any more features than this."

-"Right. What's most important is increasing basic firepower."

-"There's no need to rush. Let's fortify our foundation as we go."

No matter how long it took, they would leave the future with a fighting chance-- that was what Wakaba and Hinata swore.

-"Hey, Wakaba-chan. Sometimes I let a 'demon' possess me too."

-"Huh, what?"

-"Heheh, just as a figure of speech, though. Sometimes those who manage organizations have to play devil's advocate and do things we don't necessarily agree with. Like erasing things from the record-- even important things."

Hinata spoke as if she were trying to persuade herself to do something.

And Wakaba immediately knew what that was.

-"... You mean Chikage...?"

-"Yes. Her record... will be erased. If we keep defending her, it'll be hard for us to move around within the Taisha..."

-"... That's quite a political assessment."

Even as she said that, Wakaba felt a deep sense of self-resentment for allowing such a situation to develop in the first place.

-"... I'm sorry... There was... no other way..."

Hinata hung her head and squeezed out those words.

-"The Taisha's influence is immense. ... But it's not as if everyone in the organization is a saint. And I'm sure some will be exposed... for abusing their authority. We cannot let such people have access to the Taisha's true authority. I must find a way to maneuver through the Taisha's ranks and protect its health as an organization..."

The organization known as the "Grand Shrine" Taisha was reborn as the "Amnesty" Taisha. Personnel reductions and shrine remodeling and reconstructions were to follow, and its influence as an organization would probably grow. The Taisha was changing. And there was no guarantee that it would be free of corruption.

Hinata remembered the diary they had found underground in Osaka. A tragedy caused by selfishness like that-- must never happen again.

Wakaba looked at Hinata's determined face and nodded.

-"This'll be hardest on you, won't it...? I'm counting on you."

-"Okay. But let's at least leave Chikage-san's name somewhere. The name 'Chikage' seems pretty versatile, after all."

-"... Yeah."

Hinata and Wakaba left Marugame Castle and headed back to the dorm.

The rose madder curtain of the sunset coated the city peeking out from the inner citadel.

Hinata looked up at the sky.

Shikoku was at peace again today. The sky spread out as far as the eye could see.

Hinata raised her hand towards the sky.

But it was too high for anyone to reach with their hand.

-"We humans live on the earth, under the gaze of heaven above... We may be weak, but that's why we never give up."

Wakaba smiled.

-"Yeah. We've got a long, long battle ahead of us, but let's take it one step at a time. Hinata, as long as you're with me, I can keep going forward forever. Just as I always have."

-"Me too", Hinata replied with a smile.

-"Thanks, Hinata. Thanks for everything... and for everything to come."

-"I should be thanking you. We did promise to be together forever. Besides, no matter how difficult a goal may seem, you're likely to succeed if you try."

And thus came a close to the Common Era.

The war with the Vertexes reached a temporary armistice, but the heroes' and miko's fight continue--

Fall 300 DE

The members of the Sanshu Middle School Hero Club were all helping out Nogi Sonoko sort through her books at home. Sonoko had a large quantity of books delivered from her parent's house as research material for her novel writing.

Among those books, they had discovered a book entitled "Hero Record".

-"No...gi... Wa...ka..ba... Is she my ancestor~? If she wrote a hero record, then does that mean my ancestor's a hero?"

-"Sonocchi's ancestor wrote a hero record. Or rather, as her descendant, Sonocchi's the one who wrote a record with the same name, right?"

-"So there were heroes already that far back in the past, huh... This can't be a prank, either... What a surprise, huh, Yuuna?"

-"..."

Even when Fuu addressed her, Yuuna said nothing. She was too busy staring holes into the photo of Nogi Wakaba pasted onto the last page of the Hero Record.

-"Yuuna, what's wrong?"

When called out to a second time, Yuuna finally snapped back and started talking.

-"I feel like... I've met this Nogi Wakaba... somewhere before."

-"Huh? But she lived centuries ago?"

Fuu furrowed her eyebrows dubiously. Yuuna seemed unsure herself as she wracked her brains trying to remember with a "Hmmm..."

-"... Oh yeah! You guys remember when I lost consciousness during that last battle? I felt like I met her then... or she called out to me... or something...? Mmm, it's hard to explain it."

Yuuna gave a troubled smile.

-"She called out to you? ... Perhaps the honorable hero of the past was encouraging you?"

Tougou looked at the photo of Nogi Wakaba.

A hero of the past encouraging a hero of the future--

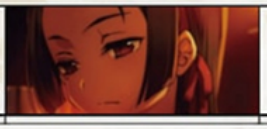
It seemed like an illogical dream, but heroes had logic-defying power in the first place. In that case... perhaps such an occurrence was more plausible than it might have seemed.

-"That's sounds kind of dramatic."

Itsuki said with a fascinated look on her face.

-"Itsuki does like those sorts of stories, huh" her older sister teased, causing the younger sister to blush just a little.

-"Let's try reading a bit more."



Tougou turned the pages with a serious look on her face.

The other five peeked at the book too.

-"These pages are all blotted out, huh... Ah, there's still some text around here. Looks like the record wasn't written by just one person, huh."

Karin pointed out some of the pages as they flipped through them.

What appeared to be a list of names had escaped censorship.

-"Doi Tamako... Iyojima Anzu... Takashima Yuuna... Huh, Yuuna-chan?"

Tougou looked back and forth between Yuuna and the book.

-"She has the same name as me... Is that a coincidence?"

-"No, I don't think it's just a coincidence~"

-"Huh?"

All eyes fell on Sonoko.

-"Well~ long ago, I heard that the name 'Yuuna' was special. Ever since long ago, babies have been given that name if they do a li~ttle something like this~ when they're born~"

Sonoko knocked her hands together in some sort of gesture.

-"...? So a baby just has to do that by coincidence while playing...? Seems like a sort of good omen, or something."

-"Yeah, yeah, that's exactly it~ Nibosshi~, you're so smart~"

Infants who perform a special action at birth are bestowed with the name of a hero of the past-- perhaps as a good omen, indeed.

-"So the name 'Yuuna' originated with this hero, Takashima Yuuna, as a long-running tradition throughout the Divine Era's history, huh..."

As Tougou fondly thought about the nation's history, Fuu held her hand up to her eye in an incoherent pose and spoke:

-"I see... Yuuki Yuuna... thou hast the Yuuna Factor... You are a Yuuna..."

-"I don't get what you're saying, Onee-chan."

Everyone burst out laughing.

Tougou looked at the faded Hero Record and said

-"Someone probably hid this book for a reason..."

-"But in the end, it was found and censored. What a mischievous founder, huh. ... But from what little is left, we can still tell that the Common Era had a rough time too. We can at least know that."

The heroes of the past worried, suffered, and got hurt too-- but they probably still risked their lives to live.

Yuuna looked at her own hands.

-"The reason we have a present is because of the combined efforts of allll those people in the past, huh. ... We have to thank them."

That night-- after everyone else had finished sorting Sonoko's books and gone home.

Tougou alone remained in Sonoko's house to speak with her.

-"That Hero Record was censored in black, but there were also red censors, too. So it was probably censored twice. And the second round of censorship... erased almost all of it."

-"Which means we can conclude... just one thing, huh~"

-"Yes. The Taisha's disposition for information suppression has increased over the years."

-"The laws about protecting big secrets... must've gotten a little crooked in interpretation after a hundred~... two hundred~... three hundred~ years or so, huh... The silence on Sange is a perfect example."

300 years.

An overwhelmingly long span of time.

The "Amnesty" Taisha was built up with Uesato Hinata and Nogi Wakaba at its center. Back when they were around-- it was perhaps a more wholesome organization.

But nothing lasts forever. As generations beget generations, as time passes by, change happens.

-"Well, they did promise to talk things through properly from now on~"

-"True. Let's think of it as one step forward."

One step forward, no matter how small--

that step will become a baton for the future.

(Extra Chapter END)

